CUTCLIFFE HYNE'S NEW SERIES Begins this Number

The Popular Magazine

SEPT., 1905

10 CENTS

COMMANDER McTURK

FRANCIS LYNDE'S great railroad story, "THE EMPIRE BUILDERS," will appear in the October number

VOL. IV. NO. 5

The Popular Magazine

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Monthly Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

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Entered at the New York Post Office as Second-Class Matter, under Act of Congress of March 2, 1879

WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons who have been thus victimized.

LEARN TO WRITE ADVERTISEMENTS

Men and Women who want to earn from $25.00 to $100.00 a week should read this article.

The founder of and instructor in this Educational Institution is the only man ever recognized as Expert on advertising instruction by the United States Government.

WHY don't you learn by mail to write advertisements?

There is a fascination about the lessons that takes the place of other entertainment. The man who is expecting a dry, uninteresting study is pleasantly surprised when he devotes himself to our course.

One student recently said: "I was never so much surprised in my life at the ease and aptitude with which I began to study your course. My hesitancy was due largely to the fact that I imagined it would be hard for me to study, realizing that a man in business loses the knack of school book concentration. I made up my mind to go at it, never dreaming for a moment that the instruction could contain so many really entertaining as well as business features. Instead of a task I looked forward to my evenings with as much pleasure as a summer's vacation. It is certainly an enjoyment for a fellow to see how his few hours of study, otherwise wasted, are adding to his qualifications. And the best of all is that I can see the advancement myself without relying upon others to call it to my notice. In the study of advertising, pleasure and work go hand in hand. It supplies mental rest after daily routine and adds to my qualifications."

This is but one of the honest expressions from the scores of letters we receive showing the sentiment of the Page-Davis students.

Will Increase Your Salary

There is nothing that will lift you out of that miserable feeling of uncertainty of future probabilities, like a course of advertisement-writing by correspondence from the Original School. It will place you upon a firm and confident basis, by fitting you to earn a much higher salary every week.

You can spare the money as easily as the man who received $8 a week, $6 of which he used for support of his mother. He joined our school and is to-day enjoying a $4,000 income.

You have as much natural ability as the bundle-wrapper we educated in advertising. He is earning $2,000 a year.

You have as much time at your disposal as a street car conductor who worked twelve hours a day and who is now earning $2,000 a year as advertising manager, providing you have a common-school education and common-sense to back it up.

Write us a few lines asking for our beautiful 48-page prospectus which will be sent you free. It contains all the information you desire, setting forth the most profitable and fascinating study, and points out the way for better qualifying you for business affairs.

Write for it now and we will send it to you free of cost.

Page-Davis Co.

Address Either Office:

90 Wabash Ave.
CHICAGO

150 Nassau St.
NEW YORK

9171

PAGE-DAVIS COMPANY
Chicago or New York

CUT ALONG THIS LINE

Send me without cost your prospectus and all other information setting forth a most profitable profession for a man or woman to enter.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

A Chat With You

THIS month we take great pleasure in introducing to you Commander John Kelly McTurk, U. S. N. You can see him making his bow to you on the cover. You notice his tall, lanky form, his sunburnt, weather-worn, determined face, his honest and simple eyes. You know that you are going to like him, and you will like him more and more as you follow his doings in successive numbers of THE POPULAR. You will find that he has all the simplicity, bravery and recklessness of a true son of the sea; that he has the daring and shrewd common sense that have made Americans admired all over the world; that he is human and lovable through and through. Commander McTurk is a man from whom you may always expect the unexpected.

IT is seldom, indeed, that one finds an interesting and lovable character as the hero of a story of adventure. Generally such a character possesses all the virtues, few of the vices and absolutely none of the human traits and peculiarities that make people likable. Cutcliffe Hyne, in writing the Commander McTurk stories, has succeeded in doing what he did in his Captain Kettle tales—a thing that few others have ever done—produced a series of stories interesting because of the character around whom they are written, as well as for the dashing adventures which they describe.

IN this issue you get acquainted with Commander McTurk, Mr. McMechie and other characters whom you will know better later on. You will vote this first story, "Annexed in Error," one of the best you have ever read; but there are still finer tales coming. Next month you will learn how Commander McTurk ran the blockade at Port Arthur, and how a young lady turned up unexpectedly with a torpedo in the Yellow Sea.

"ANNEXED IN ERROR" is not the only story in this number that is worthy of mention. Morgan Robertson's two-part story, "The Shipowner," starts in this issue, and there are a number of short stories, each one remarkable in itself. Read "The Ghost of La Moissine," by Clinton Dangerfield, and "Annabel's Wager," by Rafael Sabatini, and you will know what we mean by variety and excellency combined.

WE feel that in this issue THE POPULAR has entered on a new stage of growth. We've set a high

standard, and our effort is to raise the standard every month. You will see that we are in earnest when you get the October POPULAR. In that will appear a novelette to which we wish to call your especial attention, because it is one of the best we have secured and because it deals with a side of life that is peculiarly American.

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IN America the railroad business has reached its greatest development. This country owes more to its railroads than any other in the world. Other countries have grown naturally, but this one has been "built up" systematically through the genius and enterprise of the Americans themselves. Railroad ties and gleaming rails, puffing engines and long freight trains, gangs of section hands sweating in the sun, bridge builders throwing their iron spider webs across valley and stream—these were the instruments and tools used in the building of the country. The prosperity of America and the development of the railroad have gone hand in hand. The life of the railroad man has been the life of the most typical of American citizens.

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IT was because of this that we selected the railroad enterprise as the theme of one of our series of industrial novels. It was also because of this that we made an especial effort to have it a true and interesting picture of the life. Francis Lynde is already well known to you as an author of railroad stories. His novel, "The Empire Builders," which will appear in next month's POPULAR, is not only a tale of fascinating interest, but a real and vivid picture of one of the most distinctive phases in American life.

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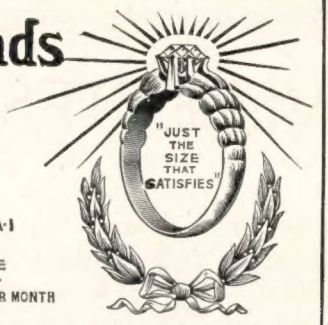
WE are not resting on our oars during the hot weather. We realize that to hold your interest at this time of the year we must offer you something exceptionally good. We can promise you that next month's POPULAR, as well as this, will be worth while carrying with you wherever you go—to the seashore, mountains or anywhere else. We are still on the hunt for good stories, only we are chasing them harder than ever before, and we are giving you the result of our hunting in the magazine, from month to month. Write to us and tell us what you think about it. Let us hear of it if there is anything in the magazine that you don't like. If there is anything in the magazine that pleases you particularly, tell us about it. And, lastly—if there is anything you would like to see in the magazine that is not in it now, don't keep it to yourself. We are looking for your co-operation in our work.

Diamonds on Credit



½ CARAT QUALITY A-1
$72.50
OTHER GRADES OF SAME SIZE AS LOW AS $50.
TERMS $12. CASH. $6. PER MONTH

DIAMONDS are sometimes a NECESSITY as handmaid to success, oftimes a source of PLEASURE and always a GOOD INVESTMENT. The volume of business which comes to us by reason of our liberal terms—enables us to sell diamonds ON CREDIT at practically CASH prices. The ONLY objection to buying on credit is thus removed.

Let us send you on approval, express prepaid, a half-carat diamond set, in mounting like illustration or ANY STANDARD 14-Kt. solid gold mounting. If ring is as represented, pay express agent $12. If you prefer that goods be sent by registered mail, send first payment WITH order. Balance may be paid monthly. YOUR reputation for honesty is OUR security.

Send for FREE Ring Catalog No. Z83. It shows a wealth of Diamonds from $12 to $650. If interested in Watches, ask for Special Catalog.

Herbert L. Joseph & Co. HIGH-CLASS JEWELRY CREDIT HOUSE

213 (Z83) STATE STREET, CHICAGO

Established 1882 *Responsibility, $250,000.00*

Wives sometimes object to life insurance. Widows never do. They know its value. Get particulars free. No importunity.

Penn Mutual Life
Philad'a

$20 to $50 WEEKLY MADE SELLING THIS NEW INVENTION, THE STANDARD SELF-FILLING SELF-CLEANING FOUNTAIN PEN

No ink dropper. **No** smeared fingers. **No** twisted rubber. **No** complication.
$178.90 earned in **32** days by retired business man in Ala.
$48 earned in first four weeks by Rev. Gehring, of N. Y., **spare time only.**
$35.80 for a month's odd hours by G. Jos. Lovett, of Mass.
$5.40 made in **first two hours** by Mrs. Mary M. Lennon, of Mich.
Our free lessons in successful salesmanship make experience unnecessary. We send all particulars and **figures to prove** above **and many other** records; write today

Energetic Agents and District Managers Wanted.

STANDARD PEN CO.,
972 Baker Bld., TOLEDO, O.

SELL GOODS BY MAIL

Greatest successes of recent years have been made by Mail-Order firms. Note the large number of advertisements in weekly and monthly publications; nearly all transact business through the mails. For the beginner in Mail Order business, the principal thing is to start right. By following our plan, which has been tested for years, you are certain to start right; it tells how a profitable Mail Order business may be started; best line of goods for beginner; hints on advertising, etc. Plan free to interested parties. CENTRAL SUPPLY CO., 1002 S Grand Avenue, KANSAS CITY, MO.

FREE "THE LAND OF WEALTH"

It shows where the great fortunes are being made with full detailed information of that vast land of treasures, Mexico; mailed six months free.

F. W. SCHUMACHER & CO.,
Dept. D, 82 Wall Street, New York City.

GINSENG

$25,000 made from one-half acre. Easily grown throughout the U. S. and Canada. Room in your garden to grow thousands of dollars worth. Roots and seeds for sale. Send 4c. for postage and get our booklet B N, telling all about it. McDOWELL GINSENG GARDEN, Joplin, Mo.

SOUVENIR POST CARDS

Send 10c. for our handsome set and complete catalogue listing subjects from all over the world at prices lower than ever before. NATIONAL POST CARD CO., 606 LOGAN BUILDING, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

BOUND VOLUMES.

Handsome bound volumes of **THE POPULAR MAGAZINE** now ready. Each volume contains eleven hundred and sixty-four pages of interesting reading matter. **PRICE, $1.50.**

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, 79-89 Seventh Ave., NEW YORK.

5¢ a Word

is frequently paid by magazines for original short stories and well written articles. No field is so profitable as Journalism. None easier to enter. We positively teach Journalism by mail. Write us at once for **free** particulars.

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The Sprague Correspondence School of Law,
446 Majestic Bldg, Detroit, Mich.

AINSLEE'S NOVELETTES.

A WHOLE library is embraced in the series of novelettes which have been published in consecutive numbers of Ainslee's Magazine. Each one of these stories is equivalent to a novel for which you would have to pay $1.25 in book form, and as stories are a good deal better than most dollar-and-a-half books. A list of them is given below, and the numbers of Ainslee's containing them may be had of your newsdealer, or upon receipt of fifteen cents each. Application should be made promptly.

1902

"A Mercenary Marriage," By Ethel Watts Mumford. *November*

"The Unequal Yoke," By Neith Boyce. *December*

1903

"No Hero," By E. W. Hornung. *January*

"Money and Matrimony," By Josephine Dixon. *February*

"Time, the Comedian," By Kate Jordan. *March*

"Cyril Vane's Wife," By Alice Duer Miller. *April*

"Midsummer Madness," By Edward S. Van Zile. *May*

"Partners," By Ethel Watts Mumford. *June*

"The Ribboned Way," By S. Carlton. *July*

"An Unwilling Guest," By William Gordon-Perez. *August*

"The Blue Moon," By Lucia and Esther Chamberlain. *September*

"The Measure of a Man," By Francis Prevost. *October*

"The Guardian Angel," By Baroness von Hutten. *November*

"A Girl of To-day," By Elizabeth Duer. *December*

1904

"The Siege of Sar," By Francis Prevost. *January*

"A Natural Divorce," By Elizabeth Duer. *February*

1904

"Miss Vanity," By Mary Hamilton Park. *March*

"The Inn of the Long Year," By S. Carlton. *April*

"Debonnaire," By William Farquhar Payson. *May*

"The Custodian," By Archibald Eyre. *June*

"Baccarat," By Frank Danby. *July*

"The Flight of a Moth," By Emily Post. *August*

"Her Brother's Tutor," By Caroline Duer. *September*

"The Maid and the Widow," By Anne Warner. *October*

"My Quaker Maid," By Marah Ellis Ryan. *November*

"Her Prairie Knight," By B. M. Bower. *December*

1905

"A Belated Harvest," By Marie Van Vorst. *January*

"Cherub Devine," By Sewell Ford. *February*

"The White Wasp," By Robert E. MacAlarney. *March*

"In the Earth Flame," By Robert Adger Bowen. *April*

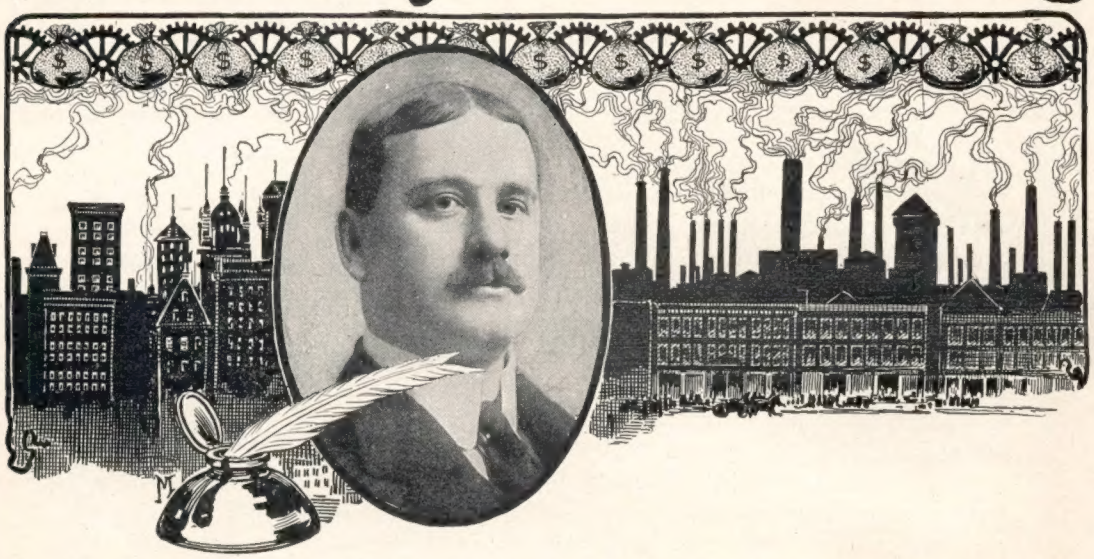
"The Playwright and the Lady," By Ralph Henry Barbour. *May*

"The Outgoing of Simeon," By Elizabeth Duer. *June*

"A Gentleman of the Highways," By Kathryn Jarboe. *July*

AINSLEE MAGAZINE CO., SEVENTH AVE. AND FIFTEENTH STREET, NEW YORK

Profits of Ad. Writing



Great Success of the New System of Correspondence Instruction

From Clerkships and Mechanics to Advertising Managers—From Small Salaries to $1,200—$6,000 a Year

By GEORGE H. POWELL

THE marvelous growth of advertising within the past few years has caused many to wonder what further strides will be made along the lines of business expansion through modern publicity methods.

I want to say a few words to the readers of THE POPULAR about the possibilities of young men and women who qualify to fill positions as ad. writers.

I have before me a letter from one of the most famous manufacturers in America—a noted Governor of a noted State—in which he asks if I can send him a competent ad. writer to take charge of his advertising, circular letter work, etc. Although living in a city of over 200,000 inhabitants, and surrounded as only a Governor can be—with a host of political and business associates—yet he cannot find a properly trained ad. man to fill the place he has open!

While I have just the Powell graduate to send him, yet my purpose in mentioning this incident—which is being duplicated constantly from all parts of the country—is to show how great is the demand for ad. writers and how small is the supply.

$25 to start with, and from $50 to $100 a week later on, is certainly a most promising vocation, especially when it may be attained in a comparatively brief period of study through the Powell System of Correspondence Instruction.

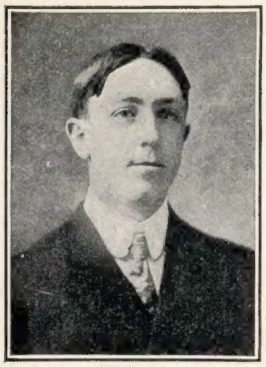
It is said that over a billion dollars a year is now being spent by American advertisers for publicity, and the yearly increase is so great that one can scarcely believe the figures.

This, too, in spite of the fact that more than one-half of the present advertising is largely, if not wholly, wasted. Competition is keen, business expansion is the order of the day, and merchants and manufacturers have learned that plenty of GOOD advertising is the best possible investment. Under such conditions, the new places being created in large houses for trained ad. writers can cause no wonderment on the part of the person who stops to analyze causes.

When I established my correspondence school to teach scientific ad. writing I had the co-operation of the best advertising authorities, and, by giving my personal attention to my students and guiding them just as faithfully as I would were they in my office and each using my entire time, I have so far surpassed expectations that Powell graduates

are to-day permanently located in every State at good salaries, and in scores of instances where they had previously experimented with other schools and had become utterly discouraged.

That I succeeded in qualifying my students is due to four things: First, I enroll only young men and women possessed of common school educations; second, the Powell System is based on an experience and reputation not enjoyed by any other advertising teacher; third, I teach nothing but advertising, whereas every other school, of any pretension, teaches from three to a hundred courses; and fourth, I advise business men who enroll with me so that their own advertising is immediately rendered doubly effective.



ARTHUR T. COLE
Firm of Cole-Osborne Co.
Whitman, Mass.

Mr. Cole says:

"We wish to thank you for the able instruction and helpful criticisms which you have extended to us throughout your course of Advertising Instruction.

"Since finishing we have been enabled to establish a monthly advertising sheet besides doing outside advertising work, the success of which we ascribe to the instruction which we received from your course.

"Perhaps you will be interested to know that we are doing very well, all the work we want. The 'Powell' System has started us on the road to success, and we stand ready to say a good word for it whenever we can."

I think it entirely proper to say that the Powell System is to-day the only one that recognizes and provides for the special needs of the business man student.

There are many reasons why the business man is benefited by studying advertising with me, among which are the lack of a sufficient number of trained ad. writers—my ability to properly advise him—a limited amount of money for advertising which precludes the employment of an ad. writer all the time, etc. And, again, clerks in many wholesale and retail houses are having their advertising educations paid for by their employers. The more we investigate the more marvelous the possibilities.

In the United States to-day there are over 100,000 lawyers and over 30,000 journalists, but the total number of ad. writers is too insignificant in number to be worthy of mention—probably less than a thousand who earn their entire living in this vocation.

But I want to add a word of caution—don't go into advertising unless you are a sticker, and are willing to be steadfast. This great business has room for those only who have stick-to qualities. If you have them, plus a reasonable amount of energy, I can teach you in a few months how to earn more than double your present salary.

I publish this month the portraits of two more of my students, as typical examples of the young men who are winning success as ad. writers. It has been my great pleasure to note the widespread benefits of the Powell System, and its record in assisting young men and women to fill high salaried positions is, perhaps, the most remarkable in all the history of correspondence instruction. A common school education plus reasonable energy are the only essentials. Ability to draw is unnecessary.

C. E. WYANT
Advertising Writer
Seymour, Conn.

Mr. Wyant says:

"I wish to thank you kindly, Mr. Powell, for the personal interest you have taken in me, and for the honest, sincere criticism of all my lesson work. Never for one moment have the lessons been dull or confusing, and he who fails to master them after following your instruction must be dense indeed. When you can advance a man—as you have in my case—from a state of absolute ignorance of even the elementary principles of ad. writing, to a thorough knowledge of the most minute details, my endorsement of your excellent system is apt to be an honest, sincere acknowledgement of all you claim it to be: 'THE BEST.'"

Mr. Cole and Mr. Wyant tell herewith what they think about the Powell System as the best to be had. And what I have done for all my old students I can do for new ones.

I only seek to enroll students who are brimfull of life and ambition, and who feel that they are willing to work to win. Powell graduates are a great success, not merely because my system of instruction is the best in existence, but because my interest in a student never flags.

I have published an artistic comprehensive Prospectus, which is by far the best explanatory treatise on learning ad. writing, and I shall be glad to mail it if you will write for it. It also tells the business man how to double his trade. Address me,

GEORGE H. POWELL
1552 TEMPLE COURT, NEW YORK

ANOTHER MONTH GONE!

and the little family in your cheerful home is still unprotected from the trials of financial stress if you should be suddenly taken away.

Save them that trial. Save a little money which now goes for incidentals, and let it build a barrier wall against the attacks of want, when such protection is most needed

The PRUDENTIAL

can help you build that wall. It is no idle catch phrase that has inseparably linked the Prudential name with the rock of Gibraltar. It *has* the strength of Gibraltar, and you may well use its resources, its solidity, its liberal terms of insurance to safeguard the financial welfare of your family.

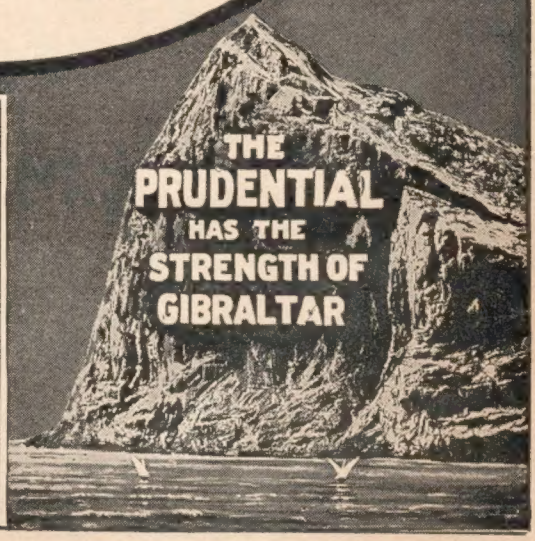
THE PRUDENTIAL

INSURANCE COMPANY OF AMERICA

Incorporated as a Stock Company by the State of New Jersey

JOHN F. DRYDEN, President

Home Office NEWARK, N. J.



A SPECIAL DEPARTMENT

is maintained by The Prudential for furnishing information by mail to persons investigating and contemplating Life Insurance. We will be pleased to send particulars of any policy you may wish if you will inform us as to the amount you desire to invest each year. Participating Endowment Policies of the Prudential furnish the two-fold object of protecting your family and providing a guaranteed and profitable investment for yourself.

SEND THIS COUPON

Without committing myself to any action I shall be glad to receive, free, particulars of Endowment Policies.

Amount .. ..

Name .....

Address .....Age....

Occupation .....Dept. 95.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. IV. SEPTEMBER, 1905. No. 5.

The Trials of Commander McTurk

By Cutcliffe Hyne

Author of "Captain Kettle, K. C. B.," "McTodd," Etc.

I.—ANNEXED IN ERROR

This is the first of an important new series of stories by the creator of "Captain Kettle," than whom no character in latter-day fiction ever achieved a greater popularity. We do not think it any exaggeration to say, however, that in the present series Mr. Hyne has surpassed his previous work, and that his ultra-patriotic American character, "Commander McTurk," will find even greater favor with the reading public than did the doughty English captain

(*A Complete Story*)

COMMANDER JOHN KELLY McTURK was seated on a green up-ended gin case, with a trimly booted heel under each elbow, busily employed in putting his impressions of Mana-o-loa harbor onto a three-feet-by-two canvas. His medium was oil color; his method called largely for the use of thumb and palette knife, and, although even he did not consider the painting in any way complete, it already showed symptoms of being much on a par with his previous works.

It was a curious trait of J. K. McTurk's pictures, that no one was ever yet known to guess the subject correctly, and, further, that few people with anything like perfect eyesight could gaze upon their color scheme without painful emotion. Commander McTurk modestly said himself he was "a bit of an impressionist."

The square, green gin case, a piece of jetsam from the vague Pacific, was the only available seat on the dazzling white sand of the beach, and it cramped a man who measured six-foot-three to squat on it for more than an hour at a stretch. So when he had thumbed in a zigzagged streak of white to represent the breakers on the barrier reef, and a square of rasping green to mark the roof of the German consulate, Commander McTurk stood up and gingerly straightened himself.

"Ouch!" he said. "That's cramping; but it's worth the trouble. In a week from now that picture will be history—Mana-o-loa before it was annexed to the United States."

Just then a girl stepped out from behind a palmetto clump into view of the beach, saw Commander McTurk,

and waved him a friendly greeting. She was dressed in crisp white muslins, and had a plaited muslin band round her panama, and under that outrageous sun she gave the eye a treat in coolness. As she came nearer, McTurk moved up the beach so as to feast his gaze upon her against the ultramarine background of the harbor water.

She caught his idea and laughed. She wagged a slim finger at him. "Yes," she chaffed, "and you said last night, at Mr. McMechie's, that you were not a lady's man, but merely a boorish sailor. Well, commend me to sailors for subtle compliments."

"Oh, I never made the least pretense at not admiring you, Mrs. Derringer. Let me see, I saw you first at uptown Delmonico's, in New York, then at the Hotel Cecil, in London, then at that Theater Port Saint-Something, in Paris, where the seats are so narrow you can't straighten your knees; and then, of all places, you turn up on McMechie's plantation in Mana-o-loa. Now, Mrs. Derringer, if I'd adored you silently in America and Europe, could I do less than tell you so when we meet on a Pacific coral heap, to speak to one another for the first time?"

Mrs. Derringer inspected the cleanliness of the green gin case with a cautious finger, and then sat herself upon it and looked out upon the twinkling blues of the Pacific. "I wonder," she said, thoughtfully, "where we shall meet next? Neither you nor I will be allowed to stay much longer in these islands, that's certain."

Commander McTurk stiffened. "Ah," he rasped, "that's news to me. You and I, Mrs. Derringer, are both, I believe, United States citizens, and law-abiding citizens at that, and if our consul here does have a chewed-string backbone, it doesn't follow we haven't stiffer set-up men left at home."

Mrs. Derringer waved a slim white hand to where four ugly, obsolete war ships bucked over the heavy harbor swells. "There are two Germans," she pointed out.

"One's got no engines and the other no guns; and both have got boilers as thin as a rusted cracker tin. Neither of them could heave up and steam out against the bit of a breeze there is today."

"The Britisher, I believe, is the pick of the fleet."

"Well, she can steam, if you count that. But she's no armament. Chasing seal poachers is about all she's good for."

"Still," persisted Mrs. Derringer, "she's better than our poor old Yankee relic."

"That's a solid fact," said McTurk, savagely. "If it came to a pinch, our man would fight her till she sank, but, as it is, it takes him all his time to keep her afloat with his guns housed."

"But," persisted Mrs. Derringer, "it seems Captain Shaw won't fight. He told Mr. McMechie so at breakfast this morning up at the plantation. He says his orders from Washington are plain—under no circumstances is he to bring about international complications."

"Huh!" snorted McTurk. "That's politics. That's some saloon-corner man stretching out his hand right out here across the Pacific, and using the navy as a cat's-paw. Well, if Shaw's a strong man, he'll know how to disregard instructions, if he considers that doing so is for the good of the United States. I know that's what I'd consider duty, if I were in command here."

"That's quite believable, on your previous record," said Mrs. Derringer, dryly. It was a sore point, and she knew it.

"Well," said McTurk, judicially, "the circumstances were very much as they are here; it was a case of whether I cared to act for my own interest or for the United States, and, of course, there was no choice. The States pulled off the deal, and I was disowned, just to save somebody's face. As you know," he added, with a sigh, "I've been on the retired list ever since."

"Mr. McMechie was commenting on it. He further said that as Captain Shaw intended to act by routine, and let the Germans or the French or the Johnny Bulls bounce themselves into possession of Mana-o-loa, he thought it

quite on the cards that Commander J. K. McTurk would bring off a *coup d'état,* and put the States in possession of these islands, and himself back on the active list of the navy, all in that same *coup.* I wonder if it will come off."

McTurk stared wistfully out over the tumbling blue and white waters. "I wonder, too," he muttered.

Mrs. Derringer stood up and tapped a little sand from her remarkably neat shoe on the green side of the gin case. "Walk with me back to the plantation, will you?" she asked. "This beach will be no place to sit on presently. Look at the way the 'trades' have been blowing these last two days. We're in for a hurricane directly. There, don't laugh at me for being weatherwise. You must remember I was brought up in these islands."

They left the white beach and passed through the coast fringe of vegetation to a good, hard road beyond. The foliage of the palm trees rattled to the growing gale with a dry noise like hail on a corrugated iron roof. The groups of natives, that an hour before had been talking excited politics, were breaking up as the portents of the storm became more clamorous. On the roofs of the native houses, which nestled here and there in clearings by the roadside, brown-skinned Kanakas were working with unaccustomed energy with sennit rope and coral lump to make fast the thatch against the tearing fingers of the greater gale that was to come. The temperature had gone down to sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit, and nipped the whole island world with its unaccustomed chill.

Once, before they got to the higher ground, they were given a glimpse of the harbor, foam-flecked and framed between swaying tree trunks. The war ships, with their heavy crews, were ant hills for industry. They were all sending down their old-fashioned topmasts and yards, and other top hamper. They were securing boats, guns and deck fittings. From the stern of each a white fan of wake boiled out, to show that already they had commenced to steam up to their anchors. An hour ago they were all ready to fly at one another's throats. Now their common enemy, the sea, had bidden them strip for a battle far more perilous.

Mrs. Derringer was a woman of middle height, but when they both stood upright, her head only reached to Commander McTurk's shoulder. He had clapped a hand under her arm to help her against some of the heavier blasts of the gale, but as these grew more and more stupendous his hold changed, and they crept along with fingers interlocked and arms at tension.

Besides being difficult, the road was becoming dangerous. Great, mop-headed cabbage palms swooped down at them after the fashion of ancient ballistas; a raffle of sand, dust, twigs and leaves sang through the air like shot; and with growing frequency great branches, torn from parent stems, strode across the roadway like some uncouth automata. Once the roof of a house, a clanging tambourine made of beaten-out kerosene tins, charged after them down the road. Once a drove of pigs, hideously terrified, fawned upon them for comfort and protection.

At length they came to the solid stone house of the German consul, and McTurk nodded toward it and laughed.

"I can't help it," gasped Mrs. Derringer. "Enemy or no enemy, we must stay with Mr. Wagner till the storm eases. This wind takes all my breath away, and I don't seem to have owned a hairpin for days."

A stout, hospitable German admitted them, and with difficulty heaved shut the door again. "It's an ill hurricane dot blows nobody no goot," he observed. "Mrs. Derringer, zere is druce between Chermany und United States while dze wind lasts, zo you may smile at me as you used to smile, mitout disloyalty. Will you haf coffee?"

"My dear man," said the lady, almost hysterically, "I'll have a room to myself, and a looking-glass, and some hairpins, if you've got any. Nothing short of all those will comfort me for the present."

"Mine housekeeper shall brovide,"

said Wagner, and, under the guidance of a comely brown lady, Mrs. Derringer presently went further into the house.

"Sit down," said Herr Wagner to his other guest. "Sit down, und I vill bring you beer. To-morrow, possibly, we will shoot one another, und you are a bad shot, I hear, und I am a big mark, but while zis hurricane lasts we will not shoot, we will trink. So?"

"Right you are," said McTurk. "I owe my throat a wetting, after all the sand and sundries that have scoured it this last half hour."

"I give you toast. Here's congratulations dat we are safe ashore instead of tossing at sea like our countrymens is on deir steamboats."

"My dear Wagner, that's where you make a mistake. If those poor ducks were at sea they'd weather the blow easy enough. But they're not at sea; they're in this infernal rat trap of a harbor, and I don't believe the ground tackle's forged that could hold them through this blow. They were all of them steaming to their anchors for all they were worth an hour since, and it's grown a hundred times worse since then."

"Zo? I haf later news. From the housetob above I see dze Johnny Bull slip his cables und steam out for the pass. Glosh! you should see the surf on the reef!"

"I must go and watch this."

"Man, you stay where you are, und trink dze good beer dat is brovided. Up there on the roof it would blow off your head."

"You can't scare me," said McTurk, "with a capful of wind. The rest of the beer can wait. I must see those ships."

He made his way up the ladder and through a door onto the roof. Herr Wagner, when the war ships of his country recently threatened to bombard Mana-o-loa, had painted his roof a rasping green, so as to catch the eye of gunners, and warn them to send their shells wide. The German consul's house stood conspicuous also by position, so anyone who occupied its roof was not likely to be up there long before he or she was observed by every resident in Mana-o-loa who happened to be awake and out of doors.

But Commander McTurk was careless of being overseen. His clothes filled and ballooned out in the wind. His hat blew away. His eye was held by a single picture. Away there in the jaws of the ship passage, his Britannic majesty's corvette, *Panther,* reared over outrageous rollers, and fought her way to sea.

Presently he allowed himself side glances, and saw the *Koenig Friedrich der Grosse* leap from her anchors, broach-to, hit the beach, roll onto her starboard bilge, and stab at the vegetation beyond it with her mast trucks. He took another look at the struggling Englishman, and turned to see the other German ship follow her consort; and while his gaze was still pinned upon that misty, surf-flogged tragedy, the poor old United States *Minnehaha,* with her anchors plowing up the harbor floor, took the ground stern first, and beat herself slowly into primitive plates, while her people squattered ashore as best they could. As fighting machines, the three war ships were annihilated inside six short minutes. And still in the ship passage, steaming full speed into the hurricane, the *Panther* just held her own.

A hand shook Commander McTurk's bony shoulder, and a voice bawled in his ear: "Man! come awa' below."

"Hullo, Mr. McMechie."

"Come awa', man. If the Britisher gets a hot bearing, he'll be ashore with the rest of them; if he doesna', he'll blow awa' oot o' ken to the south. Now's the time for the United States to annex Mana-o-loa."

Mr. McMechie's black, beady eyes shone with excitement, and Mr. McMechie's great fleshy beak of a nose looked more predatory than ever. Commander McTurk went down into the house with him, and, although the hurricane bumped and roared around them with unabated fury, they could hear one another speak in the consul's sitting room with comparative ease.

"Where's Wagner?" asked McTurk.

"Gone to assist his fellow sausages, and much good he'll do. No, sit you quiet. Our fellows on the *Minnehaha* will be all right. They've foreseen this, and nad a hawser ashore four hours back. They'll do the tight-rope act without a scrap of deeficulty."

"That's likely. But what's this you say about the States annexing these islands? Mrs. Derringer told me Shaw had special orders from Washington to do nothing of the sort."

"That's correct, my boy, but I guess you are not Shaw."

"No, sir," said McTurk, grimly. "Captain Shaw is on the active list of the navy. I am not."

"Well, there you are. Shaw knows what's wanted, but he's tied hand and foot by political considerations, and daren't move. Now, you will know a soft thing when you see it."

"Not necessarily. I bought a cotton plantation here in Mana-o-loa for nine thousand dollars, which was all my available loose cash. I thought it would be an interest for an idle man. But when I come out here, what do I find? Why, that the agent who sold omitted to mention that sensitive plant had taken charge, and would cost far more to remove than the cotton could ever be worth."

"My boy, under certain circumstances, I would give you nineteen thousand dollars for your plantation."

"Hullo, how's that? Think there's a gold mine on it?"

"No, merely a toughish proposition in cotton."

"Then you must be talking a fairy tale."

Mr. McMechie was getting excited, and the adopted Scottish veneer was dropping away from him, and the ancestral Moses peeping out. He was beginning to wave explanatory palms, and to fall back upon a certain Semitic lisp.

"Now, my boy, look at me. Do I theem like a fairy? I repeat that under thertain thircumstances I will pay you nineteen thousand dollars for the land you gave nine thousand for, and which you thay isn't worth nine thents to you to-day."

"I guess," said McTurk, "I'd better hear those 'circumstances' before we go further."

"I want to see these islands annexed to the United States. Everybody wants it except a small clique of interested politicians at home, and you know what politicians are."

"Swine!"

"Just thwine"—Mr. McMechie uttered the unclean word with true racial abhorrence—"and Shaw is under their orders. But you are not. You have position; you are a naval man; and, best of all, for the moment you are not under official orders. You know what is for the country's good——"

"I don't see the United States need lose sleep over my having bought a plantation of sensitive plant."

"Nossir. The United States is concerned with the islands as a whole, and you are the man to bring off a *coup de main* which would give it them."

"Well," said Commander McTurk, thoughtfully, "I guess I could bring that off without any blunder if I was convinced it was the right thing."

"But, my boy"—the explanatory palms were in full action now—"my dear boy, I'm offering you nineteen thousand. Come, now, we'll make it twenty thousand. Howth that?"

"Of course," said McTurk, thoughtfully, "if I imagined you were offering me, a naval officer and a gentleman, Mr. McMechie, a mere vulgar bribe to do your work for you, I should knock you down. As it is, I'll just say the matter is too deep for me, and leave it at that. Wish ye good-day, Mr. McMechie. I'm going back to the roof to see if that Johnny Bull has forced his ship out to sea, or whether he's piled her up with the other poor old scrap heaps on the beach."

Now, I do not exactly know what arguments McMechie used with Mrs. Derringer, neither do I know how that trim little lady later on overcame the scruples of Commander J. K. McTurk. Mr. McMechie, when I asked him about it, placidly told me several glib

and obvious lies, and McTurk, in reply to a blunt inquiry, with equal bluntness told me to go somewhere considerably hotter than Mana-o-loa at its very hottest. And as for the lady, I frankly confess to lacking courage to tackle her on the subject at all. But then, of course, after what happened, one is hardly able to speak with her now privately.

Still, anyway, the result of these two interviews very soon became apparent. Commander McTurk was lured down from the roof, and presently left Herr Wagner's house on Herr Wagner's pet riding mare, which he had requisitioned without leave. He made his way across the desolated isle, still having to battle with the lees of the gale, and in due course arrived—with the mare wellnigh foundered—at the little harbor of Mameetee, which is tucked securely away on the island's leeward flank.

Here was a schooner, an ordinary small trader of Polynesia, officered by white men, and manned by a brown crew. McTurk applied for a charter of the schooner to Honolulu, and, as he made instant sailing a first condition, got soundly laughed at for his pains. But having once been persuaded to attempting McMechie's *coup de main*—always, be it understood, entirely on behalf of the United States—Commander McTurk was not the man to boggle over a small matter of piracy. He lured ashore the two white ruffians who formed the schooner's afterguard with the promise of drink, and at the end of a six-hour bout had the felicity of knowing that they slept stertorously.

Then he pulled off to the schooner, and announced to the Kanaka crew that he was captain, and intended to have all orders obeyed. Casual observers always thought that Commander McTurk was too lean and lathy to have much physical strength packed away within his boundaries, and shipmates in the know had often—in naval days—made sly half dollars out of this deceptiveness. As a matter of fact, the man was a bundle of bone and muscle, and as, moreover, his arms were abnormally long, even for his great height, and his skill with his fists extremely fine, he was perhaps as awkward a customer to tackle as could be found on all the lands of the Pacific.

The nine Kanakas, then, of the schooner's crew fell into the common error. They saw a white man whom they did not know, and when he told them he had usurped the position of their lawful masters, the captain, the mate and the supercargo, they listened with open minds. When he further ordered them to hoist close-reefed canvas, unmoor and run out into the butt-end of a hurricane, why, then the transition to words and blows was natural. Nevertheless, within eight short minutes, eight much bruised Kanaka sailormen were carrying out Commander J. K. McTurk's brisk orders, and number nine only refused duty because he happened to be stunned and senseless. Commander J. K. McTurk viewed with high distaste the meager toilet arrangements in the schooner's afterhouse when he retired below to put himself tidy, after everything had been satisfactorily adjusted.

Of the safe voyaging of that borrowed schooner over tremendous seas to Honolulu I do not intend to write here at present, nor also, for obvious reasons, can I give away details of how, aided by McMechie's Honolulu agent, McTurk got hold of the steamship *Balena*, with her extremely business-like Hotchkiss gun. In theory, the Hotchkiss was supposed to be for the benefit of piratical Malay proas or thievish Formosa junks, but as for the last five years the *Balena* had been employed in pelagic and beach sealing up by the Pribyloffs, that tale should be received with doubt. However, the gun was a thoroughly sound weapon, and there were also on board twenty-five hundred rounds of ammunition for it, common shell, for the most part.

For a crew of this impromptu man-of-war, McTurk scoured the beach of Honolulu, a spot which is popularly supposed to compete with the sea front of Callao for the palm of blackguardism. But J. K. McTurk was a capable

man of his own hands, and very full of a fine confidence. He personally knew himself to have been the best man at handling men in all the United States Navy, and if the United States Navy Board failed to value the faculty, well, no one appreciated their loss more than he did.

Within reasonable limits McMechie's Honolulu agent gave him a free hand with money, and partly aided by this convincing argument, and partly by his own personal magnetism, he soon crammed the *Balena* with men and stores. Then he took her up to the hulk and bunkered lavishly, and presently, with decks full of coal and men, steamed out to sea just in time to avoid arrest. Governments had heard of his outfitting, and—remembering the *Balena's* previous record—had diagnosed an armed and extensive raid on protected seal rookeries. But McMechie's agent was a co-religionist of his own, and the news, as is usual in Israelitish circles, came in to him a little before it reached the Gentile who was to make the arrest, and the officers of the guard boat—with a wink—quite agreed that their signal to heave-to could not have been seen on account of the volumes of black smoke belched forth from the *Balena's* Japanese coal.

"Funny go," said the second in command, when they were eventually out at sea, "but you dum nearly got arrested there, captain, for something you never did and never intended to do. Funny sort of packet, this old *Balena*. They say she's made the fortunes of six men, all out of sealskins, and all by ways which can't be talked about."

"It's a black nuisance," said McTurk, "and that's a fact. We've quite tough enough a job ahead without the extra handicap, and it's my belief that this sealskin racket—which we've nothing on earth to do with—is going to cause as much trouble as we've any use for. Well, Mr. Stubbs, you can turn the hands up now, and serve out rifles and cutlasses. They're a most forsaken lot of rapscallions, but luckily most of them seem to have deserted from an army or a navy some time or other, so they should know the rudiments. Anyway, we've got just three days to teach them the whole art of drill and soldiering."

Now here on the *Balena* was displayed quite a different Commander McTurk from the somewhat indolent gentleman of the palette knife and the polite conversation with Mrs. Derringer—though it must be owned that it was the fascination of Mrs. Derringer which had been largely concerned in setting him off on his present adventures. McTurk had donned a U. S. N. commander's uniform, and had strapped a sword to his hip. He was the spruce naval officer, a little stiff in manner, and very much inclined to be formal.

His crew were as unruly a gang as ever shipped, and, seeing the circumstances under which they joined, were quite equal to have been oppressively friendly with the afterguard. But the sight of their tall, precise chief chilled them. Here was not the genial soul who had lured them to enlist; here was an American naval officer, a man in exact uniform, an official radiating vague power. They snapped up hands to their caps in unaccustomed salute whenever the ship's duties brought them to his neighborhood.

But even with this initial victory of discipline, matters ran by no means smoothly at first. When the crew heard that the *Balena* was on a filibustering expedition, with the object of annexing an island called Mana-o-loa to the United States, at first they stared, and then they laughed. But not one soul of them showed any enthusiasm. They had not been enlisted with any stated object in view, as to have done so would, of course, have entailed a stoppage of the *Balena* at the outset; a significant smile was the only answer to those who inquired the object of the voyage; and these, knowing the *Balena's* past reputation, translated the smile to mean seal poaching—so small is the value of significant smiles.

Even Stubbs, the second in command, was not told what lay ahead till they were clear of Honolulu. But Stubbs was a brazen adventurer.

Stubbs didn't care; one scuffle was just as good as another to Stubbs. As usual, he only saw the humorous side. "Funny part of it is," said he, "I believe I am a German by birth myself. However, if the game pleases you, and you're paying me for it, that's enough for me. I'm sure I don't mind giving our kaiser a bit of a smack on his vanity."

"I thought," said McTurk, with a frown, "that when I named you first lieutenant, Mr. Stubbs, you were a United States citizen."

"Funny thing is, everybody else does the same. But my old man was some sort of a Dutchman that never even learned English, and used the name of Spiegelizen, or something like that, and got paid small wages accordingly. There was a chap that worked beside him called Stubbs who hadn't half the head. But he got double the pay, just because they daren't put him on the Dutchman's wage. So it seemed to me there was money in 'Stubbs,' and I very naturally lifted the name for further use. I suppose at the same time that made me some sort of a Yankee."

"You don't seem possessed of very much love for either country or family, Mr. Stubbs."

"Oh, one country's as good to me as another, so long as it's a white man's country—say Britain or the States—but about family, I guess you're wrong, cap. I'm hot on family. I just live for my family. I'd do 'most anything to keep it amused and fed; and if you want to see the members of my family, they're standing right here now before you under this hat I'm going to touch."

With the one exception of Stubbs, all the men J. K. McTurk had picked as his officers developed weaknesses, which, remembering the pit—namely, Honolulu beach—from which they were digged, was not surprising. The engineers were incompetent mechanics, and slept on watch; the navigating lieutenant turned out to be a fraud, who had never seen a sextant; another lieutenant executed the dance of St. Vitus in moments of excitement, and called forth laughter instead of obedience whenever he gave an order; and of the rest, all had an overmastering weakness. Moreover every man jack of them drank himself full to the teeth, on the smallest possible opportunity.

But Stubbs was a tower of strength, and to carry out the simile, Commander McTurk was, at the very least, an armored turret. McTurk never had cause to strike his men. But the sight of his long wiry form in the precise uniform, with the hands clasped behind the back, and the red, clean-shaved jaw muscles hard set, always had the effect of reducing the most mutinous and incompetent of the crew to efficiency and obedience.

Stubbs was not the smart naval lieutenant Commander McTurk wished for, but he was the Yankee bucko mate to perfection. He had fought himself on to the quarter-deck through sheer weight of metal, and he had stayed there through sheer competency. His only reason for leaving the Chilian navy—where it seemed he had held a considerable command—was some trifling political complication, during the course of which he had used a greenheart belaying pin too freely on the heads of brother officers.

Lieutenant Stubbs had a mania for greenheart belaying pins. He brought one on board in his kit, and whether he was drilling the crew of the Hotchkiss gun, or teaching the small-arm manual to the rest of the deck hands, the rounded butt of this favorite weapon always showed somewhere or other through his clothes.

The *Balena* steamed untidily on over blue sun-baked seas that were, for the most part, desert, and only twice did she meet with other craft. But as coincidence would have it, each of these knew her, and edged in to meet her course.

The first was a steamboat of some eight hundred tons, badly rust-streaked and short of a foremast. When she came within hail, a bearded man on her upper bridge, who carried one arm in a dirty sling, vouchsafed this information:

"Hey, you *Balena*. Don't you go

back to them old beaches. 'Tain't healthy there now. They durned nearly got us, and I guess they're all fixed up and ready for you when you come. What's that? Oh, we know all about your having dropped seal poaching. But I'm just giving you a friendly hint in return for that protection boat you sunk for me off the Pribyloffs. It's a straight cinch——"

They saw him gesticulating on long after he had dropped astern.

The other acquaintance sailed a smart schooner, and wanted help to seize and loot some Chinese bird's nesting junks somewhere down Java way. "It's a soft thing," pronounced this second tempter, "and just the *Balena's* job. Line our pockets nicely, too. You know what a price nests have gone to now in all the China ports since old Tommy Haines tried to raid the fleet, and they all blew up together."

"Funny sort of crowd there must have been on this packet before," commented Stubbs, as the schooner dropped astern. "Seems to me you might log our blessed *Balena* as a dum pirate, and not be exactly wiping your boots on her reputation."

"It's this confounded reputation that will trip us, I'm afraid," said his superior officer, crustily. "I'd reckoned out my risks in capturing Mana-o-loa, and all the plan of campaign, to a nicety, but I never figured on sailing in a craft that's wanted by every policeman in the Pacific, and that's a fact."

"Well, it's all experience."

"I suppose so. But it's not experience I want from a professional point of view. The only excuse that I can have as a U. S. N. officer for what I'm going to do, Mr. Stubbs, is success; if I can bring the thing off, I shall be able to write a private report to the secretary of the naval department on sudden and well-directed raids which will be of high value; but if the reputation of this infernal steamboat trips us, I am free to own to you that, professionally, I shall be in a very ugly place. Our navy department," he added, with a sigh, "means to be just, I honestly believe, but it is damnably unsympathetic."

They ran to a point just beyond sight of Mana-o-loa about the time of the sunset, and lay-to there on a sea spread with such color that Commander McTurk's fingers fairly itched for tubes of oil color and a broad gauge palette knife. Thereafter, under easy steam, they made for the islands, passed through that channel of the reef, down which the *Panther* had so pluckily fought a passage, and crept quietly into an empty harbor, without hoot of whistle or rattle of gear.

The noise of anchoring was avoided by picking up some one's abandoned mooring, and before the hands had more than stared at the loom of the wrecked war ships that clustered the beach, boats were called away, and Commander McTurk led an armed landing party for the shore. On board the *Balena,* Lieutenant Stubbs trained the Hotchkiss on the staring green roof of the German consul's house, not from any racial antipathy, as he cheerfully explained, but merely because it was the most distinctive spot he could see on which to align his sights.

Their reception on shore was peculiar, and to men wound up for action, a trifle disappointing. The trade wind boomed over the isle and rattled the leaves of the palm trees together with a noise like hail on an iron roof; the crews of the wrecked war ships and the few white residents snored in the houses; and if sundry brown Kanaka ears did hear suspicious sounds, their wearers were far too fearsome of ghosts to venture upon excursions into the dark.

With the least excuse for violence, the thin nail-paring of moon that sailed among the clouds of the trade would have looked down upon tragedy. As it was, the situation trembled on the edge of farce. If there had only been some one to oppose him; if there had only been a palace, a government house—yes, even a municipal building—to seize and occupy, Commander McTurk could have seen his way with clearness. But the late king's dwelling, a rude shanty of wood and thatch, which he had intended to capture, had been accidentally

burned during the hurricane, and since then official business had been conducted from consulates.

"By Glory!" snapped McTurk, "I'll make our own consulate into a government house." And forthwith turned his lengthy strides in that direction, and was duly followed by his ruffianly escort.

The United States consul had, perhaps luckily for himself, gone away for the night on business, and the native servants of the consulate were easily impressed into obedience by McTurk's mere personality and uniform. So the next steps were simple. A dated notice was carried round by an armed guard to all the other consulates, which stated that "these islands of Mana-o-loa" are this day annexed to the United States of America, and that the hoisting of any other country's flag would be looked upon as an act of war, and dealt with accordingly. The order as dished up in orthodox official form, and signed "J. K. McTurk, Commander U. S. N.," and the personal appearance of the escort, if it did not guarantee the document as genuine, at any rate hinted that trouble would promptly follow upon disobedience.

These preparations, then, were gone through with order and dexterity, and when dawn flared up lemon-yellow from the eastern levels of the Pacific, McTurk ordered the hoisting of a large Stars and Stripes on the consulate flagstaff, and formally annexed the group of islands in the name of his country. As it was thought best to keep the Hotchkiss loaded, the twenty-one-gun salute which honored the ceremony was fired from a rifle in default of other heavy artillery.

And now followed on a period of some strain. Captain Shaw and the United States consul were away camping in the mountains, and there they discreetly remained. The crew of the wrecked *Minnehaha,* though pressed by McTurk to join his command, said that they were distressed mariners, and intended to eat the bread of idleness. The crews of the German war ships grumbled, but in view of the *Balena's* Hotchkiss, and their own unarmed condition, did nothing more. The non-American portion of the Europeans were frankly and coldly hostile.

"Never mind," said Mr. McMechie, at the end of that first very trying day. "In the face of a very considerable force you have captured the whole place without bloodshed, and set up a new government."

"Yes," said McTurk, with some complacency, "I've done all that. I can write a very valuable private report to our navy department on that."

"The only thing is to consolidate what we've got. There's no cable here to interrupt, and as the C. P. R. boat's evidently missed her call, there's no mail boat due for another fortnight. If we can steady down the island in that time, and show that our government—our Yankee government, my boy—has got the place well in hand, why, then, Washington will never dare to disown us."

"By Glory! There'd be a pretty big howl if they did."

"But you must consolidate, Captain McTurk. Till you've got your government riveted down into the soil here, with the rivets headed up, no property on the island can come to its full value."

"That's my plantation he's thinking about," guessed McTurk, but he was too delicate-minded to say so. Mr. McMechie also forbore to touch on sordid commercial details, and so the subject did not come up.

McTurk saw Mrs. Derringer that night. She looked white, he thought, and pinched. Her manner was a trifle excited. "All hail," she cried, "to the dictator! This is a model revolution. No pronunciamentos, no shooting, no fuss; merely effectiveness. I have all a woman's admiration for a strong man."

"What I did was done entirely at your invitation," he reminded her.

"And Mr. McMechie's."

"McMechie put the matter so—shall we say crudely?—that I was within an ace of breaking his neck."

She laughed. "You certainly have a

wonderful way with people. The Europeans here are all too jealous of one another to make trouble, and the natives are as quiet as mice."

"It's the natives who may be troublesome."

"Not at all. The thing took them by surprise, and they will occupy the next six months in deciding whether they like the new rule or not. By that time we shall be firmly anchored. You must remember I was mostly brought up in the islands till—I went away."

"To get married?"

"Yes, I did marry when I went away."

McTurk reached for her hand and held it in a steady grip. "Do you think you can forget that husband sufficiently to take another—to take me? You know what you said when you started me off on this expedition?"

"Please, please stop."

"No, dear, I must go through with it now. I went just because you said you'd listen to me if I brought the thing off successfully. I want to know——"

"Captain McTurk, you must, you shall, listen to me before you say another word. You asked me about my husband, and I told you I hadn't seen him for five years, and had heard he was dead. Well, news has come to me that he isn't dead."

Commander McTurk jumped to his feet. "But how is this?" he gasped. "You say one thing when I leave the island, and now you say another, and yet no mail has come in since I left. How can this news have arrived?"

"You brought it yourself on the *Balena*."

"What, mail?"

"No—my husband."

"I brought your husband!"

"Unfortunately, I saw him in the street, so there is no mistake about the matter. I hear he calls himself Stubbs now."

Commander McTurk took a letter from the table and slowly tore it into small squares.

"Stubbs," he said. "Of German extraction, he told me, and latterly from Chile. Stubbs your husband!"

He took another letter and tore that into small, accurate triangles.

"Well," he said, "if I am of any further use to you at any time, you may command me. Good-by."

The move that followed was as wholesome as it was unexpected. There steamed into the harbor of Mana-o-loa a big, fine, new, bouncing armored cruiser of the first class, seventy-five hundred tons in measurement, of surpassing ugliness and surpassing strength. There was United States written big all over her for the nautical eye to read, and for laymen her nationality was advertised by a fluttering Stars and Stripes. She had been on the China station, and had called in at the islands—at the command of a cablegram—on her road home. She bristled up to an anchorage, trained about twenty-three big guns onto the *Balena*—in reply to some piece of nervous impertinence on the part of the Hotchkiss—and boarded her with an armed boat inside five minutes.

And then, for all her smartness, she seemed to pause.

Presently, a shore boat came alongside her ladder in reply to a quiet hail, took something, headed for a wharf, and set a man ashore. Then, and not before, did the big white cruiser lower, man and arm several more boats with astonishing deliberation, and finally transport a small army in the most leisurely fashion to the beach.

"Und dey call dose Yankees schmardt!" growled Herr Consul Wagner, disgustedly. "Teufel! But I would like dem to see a landing bardy of Chermans!"

On the hard, white beach before the wharf, faced by the club, the Planters' House and the principal stores, the cruiser's captain formed up his men and made proclamation.

"Is Lalee-all-aro here?" he asked.

A stout and elderly native, who was seated under the veranda of the hotel, got up and bowed with some surprise. "That is my name, sir."

"Might I ask your majesty to step across here."

One could almost feel Mana-o-loa rustle with the shock—though it was probably only the palm leaves in the trade, as usual.

Lalee-ali-aro stepped out into the baking tropical sunshine visibly shaken.

The cruiser's captain gave a sharp command, and his men clanked to the salute.

"Your majesty," said the captain, "the United States and Great Britain, being the powers principally concerned, have decided to put your majesty on the throne of these islands, the appointment to date from ten days back. As they have stated their will upon the matter, I am sure they will not be called upon by the interference of any other power to uphold your majesty's appointment by force of arms. I think that's the lot. God save the king!"

"But," said his majesty, "the islands have already been annexed by——"

"The islands," retorted the captain of the cruiser, quickly, "are your majesty's, as I have had the honor to state. I know nothing, and wish to know nothing, of any further details of their history. If you will honor me by being my country's guest on the only bit of territory my country holds hereabouts —and that's the United States consulate —I shall be honored. To prevent mistakes, I have brought a dozen of wine and some cold beef ashore in my boat."

At the United States consulate there was no commander McTurk. That tall officer was seated in a room up at McMechie's. Before him was a letter written by an old shipmate, who happened also to be the captain of the cruiser. This letter ran as follows:

My Dear Old Idiot: I am most abominably sorry to spoil sport. But, as usual, it was your own ridiculous fault. What on earth do you want to do your filibustering in such a notorious boat as the *Balena* for? She's a pirate, seal poacher, opium smuggler and about ten blame' other things she shouldn't be. It's her I came in here after, not you, you old duck. And then, to crown all, your fool mate must needs turn on his penny tin thunder at me.

But having come in here after the seal poacher, of course I had to chip in at the other game. Oh, you dear old J. K., how I would have loved to see you hoist Old Glory and say your piece. I wouldn't have tripped you for a thousand dollars. But being here, I had to. It seems the *Panther* carried out news that we and the Britishers and the blessed Dutchmen were biting thumbs at one another over these tinpot islands, and as our man either thought the contract too big or the chips of doubtful value, I guess he and John Bull just put their heads together over a bottle of wine and thought out the way they could rile the Dutchmen most. I forget what the new king's name is, but I've got it jotted down on paper and can bring it up when the time comes. He's a native, anyway. I hope you haven't shot him or anything.

I had a letter from your sister Bridget, by the way, telling me you were philandering after some girl or other—so she'd heard —and I was to warn you off, as she was a Britisher. She added in a P. S.: "I hear the hussy is a Vermonter, which is worse." So there's your warning, J. K., and don't say I haven't told you. The old dear knew I was on the Pacific station, and felt sure I should meet you, as you were in the Pacific, too. She seems to think small potatoes of the Pacific, anyhow.

Now time presses, and I must get to the point. Seriously, old man, you must clear out and not let me catch you. As you know quite well, all our chums of the old Annapolis days would shout with laughter if they heard I'd hung J. K. McTurk for usurping a darky's vacant throne, but honestly I'd hate to do it.

There's one more tip I want to give you. There's a Jew with a Scotch name in these islands you'd do best to keep to windward of.

Good-by, old cock.

Yours unofficially,
Daren't Sign My Name.

"I wonder," mused McTurk, "how my sister Bridget got to hear about Mrs. Derringer?"

THE SHIPOWNER

By Morgan Robertson

Author of "Sinful Peck," "The Dollar," Etc.

In this very entertaining story Mr. Robertson, who has no superior as a writer of sea tales, narrates the extraordinary circumstances whereby a humble seafaring man was enabled to pose as the commanding officer of a ship, despite the energetic protests of her owner, who was likewise on board; to all of which there is a most unlooked-for denouement.

(In Two Parts—Part I.)

WEARY of world wandering, Scotty had shipped in the tow barge *Champion*—tow barges are never far from port—and sat in the dusk of a September evening on the forecastle deck, smoking his pipe and watching the black clouds banking up in the northwest, over the hills of Staten Island. The craft was at anchor off Tompkinsville; and, as the skipper, mate and the rest of the men lived in this town, and as the steamer, or, more properly, tug, which towed the *Champion* and her consort, had reached the dock too late to coal up that night, they had gone ashore to their families and friends, leaving Scotty in charge.

With him on board, however, was the owner, who, to save railway fare, was to make the trip to Philadelphia in the *Champion,* and who fretted exceedingly at the delay. As Scotty smoked and watched, this individual climbed the forecastle steps. He had a very prominent nose, large ears and mouth, and called himself Mr. Jacob Steiner.

"How is it," he asked, sourly, "that you're not ashore, too?"

Scotty rose to his full height of six feet two, and looked down on him serenely. To Scotty had come the sorrowful yet resolute stare of the middle-aged sailor—the man who has often looked fate in the eyes—and he was not afraid of this shipowner.

"I've no call to go, Mr. Steiner," he said, gravely. "My folk are over the water."

"All the better for you. Your money is for yourself."

"Ay, what there is of it, sir—and that's little enough."

"Are you kicking about your pay? Don't you get all you're worth?"

"Mair than I'm warth, possibly. I'm no kickin' only on general principles. A sailor man is paid vera little for the wark he performs. Barrin' a rare chance o' salvage, he never gets mair than a day's pay for a day's wark."

"Salvage!" snapped Mr. Steiner. "A direct gouge of a shipowner—a robbery, pure and simple. If officers and crews were not cowardly and inefficient there would be nothing to salve."

"Ay, but if they were all cowardly and ineffeecient there would be no salving done, sir."

"Makes no difference," said the owner, peevishly; then, recurring to a former line of thought, he said: "You

say you're not kicking? What's this talk about the grub? The captain says you're dissatisfied."

"I've heard complaints, sir; but I'm no kickin'. I've sailed too long deep water to take exceeption to a little thing like grub."

"But the rest are."

"Ay; they're not accustomed to maggots. And, take my ward, sir, maggots are not nourishin', unless cooked. We get ours raw."

Again the owner changed the subject. "That a storm brewing over there?" he asked, pointing shoreward.

"It'll be a squall, I'm thinkin'," answered Scotty, "and, perhaps, mair than a squall. We're on the eve of an eequinoctial, and I'm in doot, to be frank wi' you, about the holdin' ground beneath."

"Why, aren't we safe—here at anchor?" asked Mr. Steiner, in some alarm.

"Safe enough, provided we don't drag. We're ridin' to the small anchor, and the ebb runs strong the neeght."

"Then why not drop the other?"

"It's a big job, sir—a job for all hands, and they're ashore. It's no shackled on."

"A job for all hands?" answered the owner, ignoring the last of Scotty's remarks. "Nonsense! It's a one man's job to drop anchor. I've seen it done. I can do it myself."

"Ay, that you might, sir; but can you lift a foot-link chain up to the ring o' the anchor? Did you not see all hands liftin' that chain to the dock when we moored wi' it?"

"What's that got to do with dropping anchor?"

"Conseederable, sir; but I'm no creeticising my superiors. If you'll tarn to and help, we may get it done in time."

The owner looked closely into Scotty's face, and might have asked further concerning anchors and chains, but a faint and exasperating smile had come to it, and he turned to the steps. "You are an alarmist, and I'm going to bed," he said, sharply. "If we need that other anchor down, drop it." Then he went down the steps.

Scotty watched him disappear in the darkness, and shook his head sadly; then he looked over the bow at the few links of chain hanging from the hawse pipe, and shook it again, with a different meaning. They were not foot links as he had said; but they were fully nine inches in length, each a heavy lift for a man's hands, and there would be about fifteen in the air when the end was up to the anchor ring. He had spoken truly when he had called it a job for all hands.

The barge carried a patent windlass, and the squall found him with his hands on the lever. Pelted by the horizontal bombardment of wind and rain on the high forecastle deck, he paid out the last fathom of the small chain, and then went down and stood near the windlass until the jarring vibrations coming along the chain told him that the anchor was dragging. He bounded up the steps and looked; the shore lights were hidden by the smudge, but right astern, twinkling faintly and visibly nearer, was the riding light of the consort *Anita*, whose anchor was evidently holding.

Scotty grasped the situation in an instant. A collision at the end of chain cables would sink both barges. One must slip, and, this being so, it had best be the *Champion;* for the *Anita* was new and more valuable, and in no immediate danger of dragging, while the *Champion* was practically adrift, and not to be stopped by anything but steam power, or that other anchor. Securing a lantern, he descended into the chain locker and disconnected the end of the chain; then he came up, cast off the gaskets and down-haul of the jib, trimmed the sheet down to port, and was taking in the slack of the halyards as the sail blew up, when the owner struggled forward to him in the darkness.

"Just in time," roared Scotty, in his ear. "Lend a hand on these hal'ards. I'm slippin' the chain to wark clear o' the *Anita.*"

"What's the matter? What are you doing?" screamed the owner, in reply.

"Lend a hand, and don't talk."

They pulled the thrashing sail nearly up—which was enough. Then, ordering the owner to light the side lights in the lamp room, and bring them aft to the screens on the quarter, Scotty bounded up to the windlass lever, unhooked and lifted it, and when the end of the chain had flown out the hawse pipe in a shower of sparks, watched the barge, under the push of the backed jib, turn her head slowly away from the wind. When the blast came from abeam he made fast the lee sheet, let fly the weather, and sped aft to the wheel, bawling, as he passed the lamp room, to "bear a hand wi' the leeghts." The binnacle was dark, and he could only surmise from the known direction of the wind as to how the barge was heading; but as he took the wheel, he saw, looming high and near over the starboard quarter, the riding light of the *Anita,* and then saw the dim loom of the hull as it passed across the stern. He had slipped just in time.

He brought the wind on the starboard quarter and waited for the owner. When he came, struggling painfully with the two heavy side lights, he forcefully instructed him in the method of securing them in place, and then ordered him to take the binnacle lamps into the cabin and light them. Mr. Steiner obeyed, uncomplainingly, but when there was light on the compass, and Scotty had steadied the craft at south southeast, he put his mouth to the big sailor's ear, and shouted: "What are you doing with my vessel? Where are you going?"

"As I informed ye, I slipped the chain," answered Scotty, in a voice louder than the storm. "Had ye gi'en me a hand wi' the big chain as I requested, there wad na been need o' slippin'; and there's na time the noo. We're goin' into deep water, and even the big anchor wad na hold again our drift and the strong ebb teed. I'll pick up Coney Island Leeght soon, and beach her on the sands.

"Why didn't you drop the other anchor, as I told you?" screamed the owner, dancing up and down in his rage and fear. "You're a mutinous scoundrel. I know your game. You're plotting against my interest. I'll have you in jail for this! You're working up a salvage job—that's what you're doing."

"Will ye please stand awa' from the binnacle so I can see?" roared Scotty.

Mr. Steiner obeyed this reasonable command—for, in spite of the word please, it was not a request; and he even did more—he rid Scotty of his presence, darting forward along the alley and down the poop steps. Soon Scotty felt a shock along the deck.

"Damn the poor, misguided fule!" he grunted. "He's let go the big anchor wi' no string on it. I've heard o' the like, but never believed it. Lord help him, for the de'il can't the neeght."

He steered on—the course down the Narrows—occasionally lifting his eyes from the compass to search the shortened aspect for Coney Island Light. The first fury of the squall had now passed, but there was a steady, insistent pressure to the wind that promised continuance, and a vicious tumble of short sea rising, which was small index of what might be expected outside. But the air was not so thick; soon he made out a few landmarks, the lights of passing or drifting craft, Fort Tompkins' red and white light well astern, and finally the one he was looking for—the flashing red light on Norton's Point, Coney Island. It bore two points away on the weather or port bow, and he knew, as he looked, that he could not make it, even with all the sail the barge could carry. This was not much; she had once been a square-rigged ship, and still carried her three lower masts with tops, trestle-trees and caps intact—and her bowsprit. From the foremast head to the end of this bowsprit ran a makeshift stay, to which was hung the jib mentioned, and on each lower mast was bent a mutton-leg sail.

Excepting the mizzen, or spanker—a brand new purchase—sail, these sails were old; so old and soft that if set, and the barge hauled on the wind, they would assuredly go to pieces.

Yet, with this knowledge in his head,

Scotty, with a deep, dark scheme, worthy of a Scotchman, also in his head, headed the barge straight up for Norton's Point Light, and even as the rotten jib blew from the bolt ropes, called to the owner, whom he saw indistinctly, coming aft by the lee alley. Mr. Steiner came near him.

"I think it best, Mr. Steiner," he said —and there was much of request and nothing of command in his tone now— "that you loose the three sails—just cast off the brails, one sail at a time, and I'll jump and help you trim aft the sheet."

"What for?" demanded the owner.

"So we can make Coney Island and beach her, sir. We're far to leeward."

"You will *not* beach my vessel. I forbid you. I know your mind, you scoundrel. You did not tell me the truth about that anchor. You did not tell me there was no chain attached. Don't you dare attempt to wreck this barge!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Scotty, mildly. "Then we'll let her drift, and I'll get into dry clothes and oilskins for the time. Fresh water is vera cauld on the skin, Mr. Steiner." He dropped the wheel, useless now without headway, and started forward, but turned back and said: "I'll simply say, sir, that I informed ye in time that the chain was no shackled on, and asked your assistance at the job, but ye refused."

"You did not tell me in language that I could understand. You veiled your meaning," replied the owner, furiously.

"But ye understand it the noo, and it's the same language. If this barge is lost it's your own doing, Mr. Steiner."

He went to the forecastle, got into dry clothing and oilskins, then entered the mate's room in the cabin, and entered, in a much neglected log book, properly dated, the statement that the owner had refused assistance in shackling on the chain, had let go the anchor without consulting him, and had forbidden him to beach the barge on the soft and safe shore of Coney Island. He also entered his own good reasons for slipping the chain.

"For I'm offeecially in charge o' the craft," he chuckled, "and it's my duty to keep the log, which is excellent testimony in court."

But he said nothing of the silent testimony to the owner, nor of the fact that, being officially in charge, he had legal power to overrule his passenger.

He found this anxious man cowering from the storm near the binnacle, and in the act of extinguishing one of the binnacle lights.

"I see no occasion for this waste of oil," he snarled, "now that you're not steering."

"Right enough, sir," answered Scotty, cheerfully. "And it'll be well, I'm thinkin', to take in the green and red leeghts, inasmuch as we're no under command." He lifted in the side lights, and stood them on deck. "But we'd better leave 'em lit."

"But that light up forward. Take that down."

"No, no, Mr. Steiner. That's the lawful leeght to carry when under way and no under command."

"We're not under command?" inquired the owner. "Then get under command. What are you here for? Where are we going to?"

"I take it we're driftin' broadside right into the Swash Channel—unless we're too far to the east; and if so, we'll fetch up on the east bank."

"We don't want to fetch up on anything. Get this vessel under way at once."

"Ay, ay, sir; then will ye gi' me a hand to set the foresail? It'll pull her head off 'fore the wind so I can steer."

This was logical, and suited both of them. They set the small triangle of sail, after a fashion, and the barge swung off before the wind; but, as she gathered way, and as Scotty took the wheel, the foresail ripped from top to bottom, and in ten seconds was in ribbons.

"Well," shouted Scotty, to the owner, "I can keep her 'fore the wind and in the channel till the sea comes."

"What then?" asked the owner.

"We'll have to drift, or heave to under a tarpaulin, wi' this wind. That is, sir, unless ye'll agree to my beachin' her on Sandy Hook. I might make the Hook by careful steerin'."

"No!" yelled Mr. Steiner. "I will not have my vessel wrecked!"

"Vera good, then. Rig the two leeghts again, Mr. Steiner, and I'll keep her off the bottom, as you say."

"Where are we going to now?" asked the owner, when he had shipped the side lights.

"Unless I lose my way, sir, right oot to sea. As ye'll observe, I'm steerin' the course doon the channel—south sou'east."

Mr. Steiner observed, but, as he could not read the compass, he could not verify the statement.

"See that you don't wreck this vessel," he said, significantly.

"I want ye to remember, Mr. Steiner," said Scotty, at length, "that it was under your orders to get this craft under command that we lost the foresail."

Mr. Steiner turned his back to him and went down the companion. He was drenched and cold—in no condition to argue on seamanly ethics, and of no use on deck whatever, as he must have realized. Scotty, however, with an even better knowledge of his uselessness, made loud and instant protest against being left alone, but, on its being ignored, lapsed into as cheerful a silence as the conditions would admit.

The sea was rising, and, though the air was clearing of rain, showing up the more distant lights, the wind was unquestionably increasing. Fairly comfortable in his warm oilskins, and smiling a deep, dark Scotch smile in the glow from the binnacle, Scotty steered the course down the Swash Channel, but it was not until he heard faintly, from somewhere, the clang of a bell buoy, that he was sure that he was in it. Then he brought Romer Shoal Light a little on the port bow, went past it in a flurry of a squall, and soon picked up the Scotland Lightship. By midnight he had left this behind, and was in the open sea. He had obeyed the owner, and kept her off the bottom, but only to drive seaward with but one good sail on board, and this in the wrong end of her.

There were a few things on his mind now of more importance than keeping that wallowing barge before the wind, and he dropped the wheel, letting her broach to in the trough, took in the side lights, and went to the mate's room, where he entered in the log the following items: That the owner had ordered him to get the craft under command, which had resulted in the loss of the foresail; that he had forbidden him to beach her on Sandy Hook; and that he had gone below, leaving him alone at the wheel, with the difficult task of steering without forward canvas, of keeping a lookout, and of navigating from memory alone past obstructing shoals and rocks to the open sea, with a riding light up forward, which at any time, while under way, might have been mistaken for the masthead light of a steamer.

The barge was now rolling heavily in the short sea, and seamanship demanded that she be hove-to—that is, placed under short after-canvas, to steady her; and as this was a job for more than one, Scotty hunted for the owner, and found him seated in the after-cabin beside a bottle and a glass. His face was flushed and his eye glared menacingly.

"Will ye gi' me a hand on deck, Mr. Steiner?" said Scotty, mildly. "I want to set the spanker."

"No, I won't," yelled Mr. Steiner, thickly. "You scheming scoundrel, I'll be a party to none o' your tricks. You've put my property in jeopardy, and I'll put you in jail for it, remember that!"

"Ay, all in good time, Mr. Steiner," answered Scotty. "But ye won't put me in jail 'less ye get me ashore, and you won't get me ashore 'less ye take better care o' your property. She's got to carry sail."

"Get out o' this cabin."

"Ay, I will; and I'd like to get off your old ballahoo."

Scotty went on deck in a very natural rage. As he could not set the spanker alone, he did the next best thing—rigged a tarpaulin in the mizzen rigging; and as the gale showed every promise of increasing and lasting, this might be all the barge would require to hold her head up to the seas. It answered well, as the wind blew then; and when he had again shipped the side lights and taken down the riding light forward—for she was now officially under command—he took the bearings of Sandy Hook and Scotland Lights, pricked a point of departure on the mate's chart, and entered it in the log, with the direction of the wind and the probable drift of the barge. Then he added the item that the owner was intoxicated, and had refused assistance or sanction in making sail.

There were plenty of craft—steam and sail—passing back and forth at distances too great for any communication but that of the International Signal Code, which the barge did not include in her equipment; but, as it was no part of Scotty's plan to be towed in, the lack of flags and signal book did not worry him.

Faithfully keeping the log and lookout, snatching cat naps seated on coils of rope, Scotty spent the next three days and nights on deck, while the owner spent the time in the cabin, only appearing once a day—in the morning—to look out on the waste of heaving sea, snarl a few admonitory remarks to Scotty, and go down.

But on the third night the wind died away to a half gale from the northeast, though the sea still held to its original direction, and the barge plunged and rolled heavily in the trough, head to wind. And as the sun rose in a clear sky, Mr. Steiner came up, with bloodshot eyes and shaking hands, and looked around for Scotty, finding him face up to the sun on the main hatch, sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. He awakened him.

"Isn't it time to get up?" he inquired, as the big Scot opened his eyes. "Nine o'clock in the morning, and you sound asleep."

"God's curse on ye!" growled Scotty, as he hove his long frame upward. "The first time in eighty hours that I've lain me doon, and then not till daylight showed me nothing in sight. Wa' to your whusky, ye swine, and le' me be."

"The whisky is gone," said Mr. Steiner, somewhat plaintively. "Have you any?"

"Not a drop. It's no provided for the crew o' this packet."

"Well, can't you do something except sleep? We've been out here long enough. Why don't you sail this vessel back?"

Scotty's face hardened as he looked around, and then he went to the compass, looked in, and came back.

"It's a good, fair wind for Sandy Hook, though a little heavy for that old canvas, I'm just tellin' ye, but if you say so, we'll set the mainsail. Mind ye, it may blow away; but there's no whisky this side o' port. What d' ye say, Mr. Steiner?"

Mr. Steiner looked doubtfully at the brailed mainsail, then at the rolling sea.

"I know just how you feel, sir," ventured Scotty. "I feel myself that a drink wadna be amiss, after this drill; but, mind ye, the sails are old, and—you're the owner."

"Set them," said the owner, decisively. "Get this barge home."

Hot coppers are bad for the judgment.

"All right, sir, if you say so," said Scotty, "but it's against my protest, Mr. Steiner. I doot that the canvas holds in this wind."

It did not; they hauled out the mainsail with but little trouble, and it held together until Scotty, at the wheel, had backed the barge broadside to the wind. Then, at the second roll to windward, a rent appeared, and in a minute the sail was in ribbons. Scotty left the wheel, and, as the barge fell back into the trough of the sea, entered in the log the statement that the owner had sacrificed the mainsail by ordering it set against his protest. Then he came out and faced him.

"Mr. Steiner," he said, sternly, "ye'll

be willin' to admit, I take it, your hopeless inefeeciency as commander o' this barge. We're adrift a hunder miles at sea, wi' no canvas but the spanker, and we canna sail under that—it's only good to heave to with in a gale. And it's all your doing, not mine. What will ye advise doing now?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Steiner. "How do I know? Why didn't you tell me about the anchor? That would have saved us."

"I told ye plain enough, but ye didna understand. I repeat, what do you advise doing?"

"Do what you like," said the owner, sulkily.

"Do you resign the responsibility to me? Understand, if you do, and I bring this barge into port, I'm entitled to salvage. Think well, Mr. Steiner."

"I knew that was your game," replied Mr. Steiner, furiously. "I knew it. But I'll block it. Don't you fear."

"I have ye foul, Mr. Steiner, and meant to when ye accused me of dishonest scheming; but I let ye ha' your own way. What d' ye say? Shall I take charge and save this barge?"

"Do as you like, I told you. If you can get this vessel back, do so. I will contest your claim for salvage in court."

"Then I'm in command the noo?"

"Yes, you're in command, if that's any satisfaction to you."

Scotty went below and entered his promotion in the log, locked it in the desk, and then returned to the owner.

"I've an entry in the log book," he said, with the air of a judge, "which is legal testimony in court, Mr. Steiner, of every mistake ye've made since I told ye aboot the anchor. And it's under lock and key where ye'll no find it to destroy it. Ye may get off the deck and oot o' my way. If I need your sairvices I'll put ye on the articles as ordinary seaman, and use you."

The owner stared with his watery eyes as Scotty began unbending the spanker; then, perhaps fearing a possible use made of him, entered the cabin. A little later, Scotty, desiring help in dragging the sail down off the poop, went after him, and found him smiling benignly at a newly opened bottle, and in the act of pouring a glass.

"Thought you'd hide it, didn't you?" he asked, as he glared triumphantly at his successor in command. "Well, I found it."

"And I'm a *damned* good mind to take it awa' from you," said Scotty, with a snort of disgust. "Did I e'en think ye'd be mair use sober than drunk, I'd do it; but go ahead—drink yerself stupid, and keep oot o' my sight."

He entered the owner's fresh misdoing in the log, and also the item that, alone and unaided, inspired by his own seamanly judgment, he was bending the only good sail on board as a mainsail, by which, as a balancing sail, he hoped to make port in any wind or weather.

And this was the deep, dark scheme that had inspired the single-minded Scot since he had first blown away the jib—to allow the owner his own way until all canvas was gone but the brand new spanker, and to then sail the barge in under this sail in a better place.

But, jubilant with success, as he drove the owner out of the cabin to assist in setting the sail when bent, he talked about it in a very un-Scotchman-like manner, and thoroughly impressed the befuddled man with the importance of that sail to Scotty in his scoundrelly salvage job. And so it transpired that, a few hours later, when Scotty, unable to keep his eyes open at the wheel, had called Mr. Steiner from his bottle, instructed him sufficiently, and left him to steer while he took a nap on the deck, the owner, at the first snore from Scotty, dropped the wheel; and as the barge fell away, procured a can of oil, drenched the sail as high as he could reach, and touched it off with a match. The canvas was still too damp to burn past the oiled portion; but a hole was made, and the wind did the rest. If hot coppers are bad for the judgment, truly, whisky is worse.

Scotty awakened four hours later, to

find nothing left but a bolt rope fringed with streamers, and the barge rolling heavily in the trough, with the owner dead drunk in the cabin. Though the oil can knocked about the scuppers, there was no sign nor smell of oil left, and Scotty saw nothing in the disaster but increased proof of the owner's inefficiency. So this interpretation alone went into the log book, and the barratrous action of Mr. Steiner, which, if proved, might have materially helped Scotty's dark scheme, was lost to the evidence.

The wind was still brisk from the northeast, while the sea rolled on from the northwest. When Mr. Steiner had dropped the wheel, the barge, heading off her course at the time, had swung still further, and, presenting her stern to the wind instead of her bow, as before, wallowed along in the trough, yawing three points each way. She was safe enough, and when Scotty had lashed the wheel amidships, he went down and stood over the owner, stretched out and snoring in an armchair at the table, the center of an odorous radiation of whisky fumes.

"Ye dog!" said Scotty, softly, but fiercely. "Ye ruinous, forsaken disgrace to your race—how'd ye ever come to own property wi' your habits? Ye're no one o' the chosen people o' the Lord, I'll warrant. Ye're a lineeal desceendant o' one o' the lost tribes, maybe, but no true Israelite. Ye degenerate—ye revairsion to a forgotten past, get oot o' this cabin. Come, git oot!"

Mr. Steiner snored on, but made no articulate response; and Scotty, getting between his legs, seized an ankle in each hand and walked away with him. Mr. Steiner's head struck the floor, and for a moment he was awake, but the next was asleep again, and so he remained while Scotty dragged him out the forward door, along the deck and into the galley. Here Scotty locked him in, after supplying him with a bucket of water and some hard bread from the forecastle.

"Ye're a prisoner on bread and water," he shouted at the prostrate figure, before closing the door. "For desairting the wheel at a creetical moment, ye shall be locked up and eat the maggots ye provide for decent men."

He himself had subsisted on this fare since the trip began. He now returned to the cabin, entered up in the log the last happening to the owner, and ate a substantial lunch of cabin fare in the steward's store room. The whisky he hid away; it was Kentucky rye, and he was a Scotchman.

Four hours' sleep is small recuperation after eighty hours of work. Scotty went on deck with a mattress, took a searching look around the empty horizon, and lay himself down beside the wheel, where he slept through the day and the following night, while the barge, under the lessening breeze, plunged along to the southward. At daylight he awakened and arose, conscious first of a rattling clamor from the galley, to which he paid no attention; next that the wind was almost gone, and then, as his glance wandered around, that there was something in sight—a craft of some kind, dead to leeward, and about five miles away. An inspection through the glass showed him a water-washed hulk, with nothing standing but a stump of mizzenmast.

"It'll be a ship, I'm thinkin'," he muttered. "Yon seems to be a built mizzen, and the channels look long for a bark. A wooden ship — likely a Yankee."

Breakfasting hurriedly, he cleared away the wheel, steadied the barge for the wreck, and watched through the glass while she slowly drifted down before the light air still blowing from the northeast. But it was three hours later before he could see with the naked eye what he had long seen with the glass—the occasional appearance at the taffrail, as though held at arms' length in some one's hands, of an American ensign, union down.

"They're in sore trouble," he said to himself, "if they canna set it to the stump."

Soon he made out that all boats were smashed, both houses wrecked, bulwarks gone, that all the spars, with

sails and gear, were washing alongside, and that the hull, though almost out of sight, so deep was it, seemed about the same tonnage as that of the barge.

"It's Proveedential," said Scotty. "Gi'en that there's a crew in her to help, I can e'en make a square rigger o' this ballahoo, and go home in style. And if I save her spars to her owners, why, the mair saved the mair salvage. But I'll keep the dog locked up till the wark's done."

While he still had time he ran forward, leaving the barge to take her chance at keeping straight. And answering the owner's importuning through the galley window with a consignment to the lower regions, he coiled down on the forecastle deck a mooring line, made the lower end fast to the bitts, and passed the other through the chock and under the jib guys, ready to heave to the stranger.

There was still too much of a sea rising and falling to make it practicable to lay alongside. His intention was to pass close to her stern, and hang her to leeward of the deeper and more slowly drifting wreck. He accomplished it successfully. Steadying the barge to graze the stern of the other, he ran forward at the last minute, and bellowing, "Stand by for a line!" to a hollow-eyed specter whose head and shoulders rose over the taffrail, threw the mooring line to him. The specter seized it, stumbled toward the quarter bitt, made it fast, and then fell to the deck. While Scotty paid out a few fathoms, to give room for the bowsprit, he noticed other prostrate forms scattered about, some of which gave no sign of life. Making fast, he climbed along the line to the wreck, and the specter arose to his knees to receive him.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

OUT OF GOLF LINKS

IT cannot be doubted that there are at least a few shop assistants whose resourcefulness is such that they can manage somehow to find a reply to every inquiry that may be directed to them, and if they are asked for any article which they think should be found in their establishment they will surely say they have either just had it or it is about to come in, even though they have never previously heard its name.

Quite recently a gentleman was standing in a shop in one of our principal business centers, waiting, as he said, for his wife to decide what she didn't want, when a well-dressed girl walked in smartly and asked to see some golf clubs. The young man behind the counter showed her several, and in a few moments she found the one she required and went away with it tucked under her arm.

"Are there many golf players in this place?" asked the man, who was patiently, or impatiently, waiting for his wife.

"Oh, yes; quite a number," replied the assistant, in his most affable manner.

"Have you golf links here?" continued the questioner, becoming interested, for he was a newly fledged enthusiast in the game.

"I am very sorry," replied the young man, as a look of pain passed over his face, "but the fact is, we sold our last golf links this morning. However, we have ordered a new stock," he added, brightening up, "and they will be here in a few days. Which do you wish, sir, the plain or the—er—fancy links?"

The Ghost of La Moissine

By Clinton Dangerfield

The remarkable experience of a sojourner in a French province, who came upon a man who lived and moved and had his being, and yet, to all intents and purposes, existed not. The tale of an act of treason and its aftermath

SHE pushed her dark hair back from her forehead, as though it might obscure her line of vision, and stared toward the square with coldly puzzled eyes.

"I see no one there," she announced, indifferently.

"No one!" I repeated, impatiently. "Why, my dear mademoiselle, where are your eyes? I mean that tall fellow with the long cloak flung round his shoulders. Look, the one drawing water from that pump."

Again she gazed in the required direction. Again she said, indifferently:

"There is no man there."

"Perhaps you think I am drunk," I said, with asperity. "On my part, I grieve for your failing vision, mademoiselle. Pray look once more! It seems to me that his shoulders are broad enough, his face handsome enough, to induce any woman to observe him."

"I see no one," she repeated, with a weary and icy insistence.

At this I was dumb between resentment and surprise, for the man's powerful figure loomed up in strong relief from the red rays of the setting sun. He was quietly filling his pitcher, and the light glinted on his soldierly form, touching into warm tints the dark brown hair curling over his bare and well-shaped head.

Turning to the girl, I saw that her vision was fixed beyond him on the sunset line; as though his presence could not intercept an iota of the view. Then she moved slowly away toward her home, where I lodged, leaving me to follow if I chose.

I did not choose. I saw a clever-featured gamin, of twelve, perhaps, come whistling down the narrow little village street, and I halted him abruptly, catching him by one shoulder.

"Who's the man over there?" I demanded, brusquely.

The gamin, whirled into position by my clasp, took a good, long stare at the square. He scrutinized the pump, the time-worn railing round it, the beaten carpet of grass, screwing his sharp features up observantly.

"Monsieur pleases to jest," he said, finally. "The place is empty."

"Ai—hey!" puffed a short, breath-broken voice behind us. "That *coquin* is in trouble again—*hein?*"

The boy wriggled free like an eel, and turned to face Monsieur Touraine, the all-important syndic, who stood puffing out his great fat cheeks, rubbing his double chin with a gold-headed cane.

"*Grace à Dieu,*" whimpered the lad. "I've done no harm. I but answered a question."

"And gave me a lying answer," I said, sharply. "I did but inquire who that man at the pump might be—see, he is just moving away—and the young scoundrel downfaced me that he saw no one."

"Hmmm!" The syndic glanced carelessly toward the disappearing figure. And then——

"There is no one visible to me," he said, pursily, and went away.

Now Paris, from which I had newly

come, makes a man tenacious of the evidence of his senses; that being about the only thing we permit ourselves to trust in the capital. Therefore, I still believed I had seen a man, though I confess to shivering anticipations of something wrong with my eyes. Hallucinations—but what the devil should I, a tough free lance, be doing with hallucinations?

"I'll follow him," I muttered, with an oath. "I'll touch him, and see if he's flesh and blood."

The gamin heard me. He looked at the sky, and when he spoke he addressed no one in particular.

"The less one has to do with a ghost," he said, "the better."

"What do you mean?" I rasped; but he was gone.

I dashed round the corner, hoping not to lose the specter, if specter it were, But it really had disappeared. Growling, I went to supper, resolving to watch the square next day at sunset.

That night, as mademoiselle stood candle in hand—ready to light her mother to their mutual room—she looked me quietly in the face, her great violet eyes immutable as fate.

"Have no dealings with illusions," she said. "Realities are cruel enough."

Thereat she bent her graceful form and slipped an arm around the little mother. I watched mademoiselle's exquisitely sad and lovely profile as the two paced slowly toward the stair. I was too bewildered and puzzled to say anything further. I went to bed, wondering at the covert threat in the girl's strange tone.

But a menace from a woman, open or insinuated, means very little to Jacques Cartier. When sunset fell again, behold me in ambush near the pump—where I had the gratification of seeing my goodly ghost arrive, pitcher in hand.

As he filled the ewer, I stepped forward and joined him. But when he lifted his dark orbs to mine it seemed that he did not see me, so absently he gazed through me, with not a flicker to betray consciousness of my presence.

Something told me that if I spoke to him there I would get no reply. So I remained wordless while he brushed a fleck of dust from the pitcher handle. But when he moved off I followed, though at a long distance behind.

He pursued his way with a composed, soldierly stride, and presently he turned down a side street, went up another and came out on a pretty house, vine-embowered and gracious of front. As he reached his gate, I, who had quickened my pace, arrived there, too.

"Monsieur!" I said.

He turned.

I lifted my hat.

"A thousand pardons, monsieur, but I would like your advice."

His gaze lost its vagueness as he looked at me now. When he spoke his warm, rich voice gratified my ear, though his text did not.

"When you want advice, go to the syndic," he said.

"Thanks," said I. "But I have come to the conclusion, monsieur, that wisdom is only to be had from men of muscle—like yourself. What can a fellow with a figure like a bellows in blast, and a voice like the squeaking of a door, do for me?"

"You will at least incur no danger by addressing him," returned my stranger, composedly.

His words charmed me. I smelt an adventurous mystery. I would persist.

"Danger!" I said. "That is a word they use to frighten children and women. Do they use it among men here?"

A smile flickered very faintly on his lips.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"You might let me rest on your attractive piazza while we talk," I said, twirling my mustaches.

He flashed a keen, swordlike glance at me. Then abruptly——

"Come on," he said, and led the way, not aside on the piazza, but directly into his house, where he offered me a chair.

I found myself seated in a pleasant hall, with a small fire burning to keep off the autumn chill.

My host went to a cupboard, brought out a flask of wine and two glasses, and

seated himself, with these on the table between us.

"I am ready to listen," he said, courteously, as he filled for us both.

But it wasn't easy to ask advice, not having any questions ready. I seized the first chance topic at sheer random.

"I have been given the lie," I said, "by three different persons."

"Indeed?" he returned, coldly.

"*En vérité,*" I said, sighing. "The question is, how to punish them. One was a maid, the second a scamp of a boy, the third a fat, old man."

"Indeed?"

"Under ordinary circumstances," I pursued, "their punishment would be easy. In Paris I would kiss the girl, spank the boy, and borrow money from the fat, old man. But here—well, here I do not know what is customary."

He smiled, a rare and sweet smile that lighted his handsome features in such a way that my heart went out to him. I am a connoisseur in fine men—men worth striking hands with; and I swore to myself that my goodly ghost was a fellow after my own heart. But suddenly his face clouded.

"Those three," he said—"I understand. You were with them near the square. You looked toward——"

He broke off.

"Toward you," I said, easily. "And, like three fools, they swore you did not exist."

"Neither do I," he answered, quietly. "They were right."

"Now the Lord preserve me from meeting half a dozen such specters as you in combat," quoth I.

The cloud only darkened.

"For the first and the last time," he said, "you talk with a man who has no existence. You have followed me through idle curiosity——"

"Hang it, no!" I protested. "I liked you from the first glance at you. We are going to be friends."

His lips curled.

"Your curiosity shall be gratified, but your talk of friendship will evaporate. This town of La Moissine once belonged to France—as it should."

"I know. Three years ago—no, it was five—Germany won it."

"She would not have done so but for a traitor. Relief was on the way—we should have been saved, for our anciently built walls are really wonderful. But—the gate was opened—just before dawn."

He rose and walked to the window.

"The traitor did not go unmarked. Two men saw him. The coat, hat and muffler he wore were identified. They—were my clothes."

I gaped—and said nothing.

"When we were delivered, hand and foot, to the accursed Germans," he pursued; "when the enemy were withdrawn and France had parted with us forever—that peace might be established—the desire of revenge burned through the whole village. Those who, too late, saw the enemy admitted under their very noses, led the party which came—to my house."

Returning, he filled my glass again, but I did not drink, nor did he.

"I thought they came to kill me," he continued, impersonally, "and so they did intend; but in a rather unusual way. They hauled me to the courthouse, eyes of hate bent scorchingly on me. When I arrived I was put—among the spectators."

"The spectators!" I exclaimed.

"In the dock stood a tall wax figure in the very clothes which had convicted me. The judge arose, and the whole town was there to listen.

"'Basile de Reinecourte,' he said, speaking to the figure, known here as *Le Hardi*, 'our good city is in receipt of a warning that if harm comes to you four of our principal men shall be put to death—so well does Germany protect the renegades she buys.'"

"He addressed this wax figure?" I exclaimed.

"He addressed the wax figure," repeated my host, coolly. "But *my* name is Basile de Reinecourte. And I am—or was—known as *Le Hardi.*

"The judge continued pompously: 'We scorn to notice this warning. We will not bear a vile spy and betrayer among us. You shall die—in the yard

outside.' A yell of approval went up from the courtroom—and I sat listening. Then I was swept out into the courtyard, and there I saw the effigy of Basile de Reinecourte hung as high as Haman, and pelted with filth. The bass of the men, the strained voices of women, shrill trebles of childhood—all cursed—me—as I hung there."

"But *mort de ma vie*—it wasn't you!"

"Then the effigy was hauled down, laid in a rough box, and a funeral procession, to the accompaniment of biting gibes and taunts, wound its way to the river, and I, between two guards, saw the box flung into the muddy water. Back, then, to town we went, and I was placed on high before the judge, who addressed the crowd:

" 'People of La Moissine,' he cried, 'I am about to turn a ghost loose among you—a ghost that Heaven despises and even Hell will not receive. But, as you cannot see it, it will not disturb you. As you cannot hear it, no speech between you will be possible. As it has no needs, there can be no commerce in any way. If a man drinks, and dreams he sees this ghost—warn him against such dreams; but warn him only once. If he dreams again, your excellent clubs will cure him. If a stranger also has visions of perceiving an apparition, warn him, too—once only.' "

"Dieu!" I cried. "What fiendish ingenuity!"

And, indeed, in all my wide experience I had heard no tale approaching this.

"Therefore you have, for the last time, spoken with the ghost of La Moissine," continued Basile, sternly. "Hereafter you will not see me, nor I you."

"But you!" I cried. "You suffered all this—this ignominy, this torture of shame—and you made no protest?"

Basile looked at me coldly.

"Why should I have protested?"

"Because you are a true man," I cried, leaning across the table and seizing his brown, strong hand. "Because I am a judge of men—it is my one talent, a talent that never fails me. You did not open the gate."

Passionate gratitude, passionate good will toward me, leaped into my companion's face, making him splendid to see. He caught my fingers and almost crushed them.

"You mean that?" he stammered. "You believe——?"

"I know it," I said, coolly. "Now will you tell me why you suffered this injustice?"

The light died from his face,

"Have I denied my guilt?" he said, quietly. "If you come to this house you must forever come to a ghost's presence—and come like a thief in the night."

Time passed, and still I lingered at La Moissine—just for the sake of stolen visits to my specter, whom I was trying to draw into my service; for I am Captain Cartier, and I loved the man. In vain. "I must stay," quoth he. And still I puzzled until——

"There's a woman in the case," said I, boldly, to mademoiselle one evening, as we sat alone.

She laughed.

"You are grieving over your love affairs, captain?" she asked.

"No," said I, audaciously. "Over the ghost's."

She rose, like an offended goddess, in the moonlight.

"You have seen that—that—you have seen him again. And he has boasted to you that we were once—affianced. Oh, shame!"

"Not a word of the sort from him," I cried, much taken aback, and then, as she was moving off, head in air:

"Mademoiselle," I said, humbly, "surely you will forgive me! I did not know. Be just, mademoiselle——" Then, as she was still turning bitterly away, I added, resentfully: "But when was a woman ever just? Your sex are all the same!"

The gibe brought her to my side.

"I do forgive you," she said, sweetly, and very gently. "But, oh—when that fatal gate was open, it let not only the enemy into the city, but into one heart

such cold aversion to all men that you are the first whom I have not hated since—since that night."

"Except your lady-killing brother," I smiled. "A very pretty fellow he is—takes life as a wild jest."

"Too wild!" she sighed. "Once he and I were much to each other. But he, too, has changed. Captain, the law of the world is change. No sooner do we form ties than the knot begins to dissolve in the acids of fate."

"Enough of uncomfortable thoughts," quoth I. "Memory is a jade—hang her! 'Tis not I would ever want to wake the malicious wench. Let her sleep among her dirty ruins. We'll down to old Mère Clarice's little gardens and drink to new hopes."

She smiled a slow, scornful smile at me, but consented. Something in my roughness, something in my total indifference to her beauty, seemed to please her. I talked to her as I do to men, for I'll file my tongue for no mincing petticoat, and she took me frankly as a comrade, while all the village swore we were making love.

Down to the small gardens we went—gardens that were half a grapery, so that the musky perfume of hanging bunches of richness filled the air—and sat at a tiny table, where the dark green of the grape leaves brushed against the milky smoothness of mademoiselle's white forehead. Against the leafy background her face seemed a fair picture starred with eyes whose sadness were fit to break a man's heart; only I had no heart to break. I have stomach, *perdi*, instead, and 'tis far more satisfactory.

The little place was mightily clean, and the fat burghers drinking and gossiping with their wives, or the young couples chattering in silly monologues of stupid mutual admiration, were all eminently respectable.

Looking across, I saw Valentin, mademoiselle's pretty brother, entertaining a young *bourgeoise*—a blowsy little maid, who ran him an accompaniment of giggles to all he pleased to say.

His full red mouth was purple stained with wine. His golden curls were ruffled, his cheeks a bit flushed. But he was not tipsy—not yet. And when there was a sudden stir at the garden's entrance, and four men reeled in, he turned to observe them—as we did.

Resentment surged through the company. For the four were German soldiers—huge blond fellows in handsome uniforms, their pale blue eyes staring impudently out of red faces. Three sought an empty table, while the fourth coolly dropped into a chair at Valentin's table and ogled the girl coarsely enough.

"Ach, schönes mädchen!" he hiccuped.

"Monsieur!" raged the angry Valentin; but even as he spoke, a sudden something in the soldier's stare, now turned on him, made him break and falter. He lifted his hat to the girl.

"Pardon, Marie," he said, loftily. "You will be well entertained, no doubt."

So saying, he was on the point of leaving them, when the half drunken soldier clutched him and dragged him down into his chair.

"Der teufel!" cried the drunken newcomer. "Here's our friend of the gate! *Mein Gott!* I have your pretty tale of the ghost heard—how you played it so well on that fellow! *Ach!* a stolen coat and hat and a brown wig make a good gate opener!"

Valentin fought up to his feet. He was passion-pale—with indignation or fear.

"How dare you?" he cried, a vicious spark in his eyes. "You liar! You slanderer!"

The German's hand went to his sword; but the unarmed young Frenchman was too quick for him. He snatched the soldier's own weapon from its scabbard, and so protected, menaced the man, who fell back—flaming.

"Helfen mir!" he shouted to his comrades, who burst instantly to his side, with weapons drawn.

They attacked Valentin with no more ado, and I, bidding mademoiselle run for the house, joined fortunes with her brother.

The good burghers fled wildly in every direction—it's a marvel how much your citizen values his precious skin! They ramped through the grapery, tearing down the vines and crushing the bunches underfoot so that the perfume closed tipsily around us. To this hour, when I smell grapes, I see the garden at La Moissine, the overturned tables, the *bourgeoisie,* male and female, screaming off into safety, the lights streaming down on our flashing swords, and then the sudden advent of a tall, soldierly form, which appeared from nowhere, and attacked the Germans, too.

Never came a ghost more opportunely! Valentin was a sorry swordsman. A little less running after women, and a little more fencing practice, would have aided him to hold his own. As it was, he went down instantly, and I was scuffling with the three, while the fourth hunted frantically in the confusion for a weapon.

Somehow we managed, by sheer luck, to carve them just enough to send them flying without material damage, except slits in their uniforms, and then the ghost and I took time to look around, thus discovering that the garden was deserted, except for mademoiselle, who supported poor Valentin's head on her knees.

"Run for a priest!" she cried. "For a doctor!"

Valentin made a pettish movement.

"I am dying," he said, fretfully, as one with whom death had no right to take such liberties. Then he added, tauntingly, to his sister: "Whistle your fool back to you—I opened the gate."

With this he was gone. His body lying there was still womanishly pretty, almost beautiful. The wine-stained mouth fell open, however, and the eyes grew hard and filmy. I took him from his dazed nurse and laid him out on the ground, covering his face with a lace shawl dropped by some retreating petticoat.

Mademoiselle rose slowly and stood above him—hands clasped, white-faced and silent. Neither of us spoke, but stood silent also.

At last she turned to the ghost of La Moissine and said, faintly:

"Could you have saved yourself?"

"Yes," he said, simply. Then added, quietly: "But you know, Isabelle, we had quarreled and parted. You said you had made a mistake in thinking you loved me. You said there was only one creature you loved—your brother. It seemed to me that if I protected your happiness through him I still had something to live for."

"And you bore all that—for me—the gibes—the crucifixion of scorn——"

"It was for you," he answered, as though that fully explained all. "And I could watch you, now and then."

Now I am a rough soldier and blunt; but in some ways I am acute. My instincts are fine. I knew at that very minute that my ghost was about to see more trouble, for mademoiselle was poised like a despairing bird about to skim into oblivion.

"Go and kiss him," I said, commandingly.

She turned on me.

"I kiss him!" she cried. "I dare to kiss the man for whom I had no pity in his hours of bitterness. Oh, God, if I had said one little word to him, if I had showed one flash of pity. But because I loved him still I was hard as flint—oh, we women can be very hard! No love could stand against my cruelty!"

Remembering the way, the stony way, in which she had often passed my gallant ghost, I began, *perdi,* to think it likely she was right. Especially as he, his gaze bent strangely on her, would not speak.

Now she crept toward him and said in a voice which brought tears in my eyes, just as though I had swallowed too much of the pepper soup at Père Goriot's restaurant:

"Basile, I am not asking your forgiveness. But let me tell you just a little, only a very little, of how I used to look at things. I wanted to be happy—I did so love happiness. And when I promised to marry you, I grew afraid: Because I had learned one thing in Paris, where I went to school, you

know. I learned that the law of life is change. Nothing remains, everything alters. I knew an old baron there—he was very brilliant, very wise—and he taught me that law."

"Fool thing to teach a woman," I muttered.

"And suddenly I grew frightened about giving my life to anyone. 'He will not be the same,' I said, 'except just for a short time. I will keep my freedom, and play with many men.' Then came—the Germans. And I said to myself how wisely I had acted. For if I had been knit to you in marriage, flesh of your flesh, your disgrace would have been mine. I saw them burn that figure of you—yes, I saw that! I saw you sitting white and stern—and silent. And I tried to be fiercely and wildly glad of my escape, and to hate you more than anyone hated you—because I loved you still."

He continued to regard her with that strange gaze, courteously waiting for her to finish.

"He's going to wipe his feet on her when she gets through," I muttered. "He may be right—but it's an infernal shame."

"Life and the world had changed," she went on, locking her hands more tightly. "And when I tried to play with other men, I found my very self had altered, too. They wearied me. Except for Captain Cartier, I have hated all men—since then."

I coughed, embarrassed, but I don't think either heard me.

"I am very humble now," she continued, drearily. "I do not ask for forgiveness. I no longer think of happiness. The very family honor you saved for me has been lost—the whole town heard the soldier's accusation! But there is still the river bank—where I stood and watched them cast you in. I think that under those waters I shall find one unalterable thing—eternal sleep."

I swear something rose in my throat, like a fat frog. God, He knows where it came from, and I tried to squeeze it down, without avail.

And Basile de Reinecourte stood leaning on his sword, but at last he spoke.

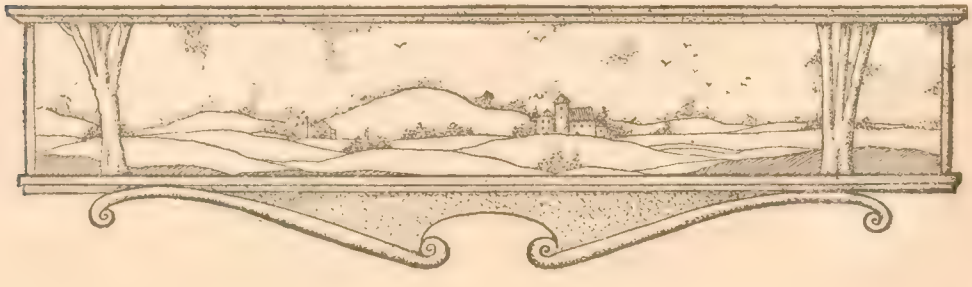
"I do not think sleep is eternal, Isabelle. And when one wakens one remembers—as I know. And a man, be he saint or devil, must vary."

"Being born of woman, could he help it?" I muttered.

"But God has set in each man's bosom a lamp," continued Basile. "Sometimes it is never lighted, or sometimes he snatches a taper from a foolish altar and lights that instead, and the first storm blots it out. But, Isabelle, if that true flame is lighted, it is stronger than man's weakness—stronger than scorn—stronger—Heaven help us—than hope. It is the one thing unalterable, which knows no variableness—no shadow of turning."

"You mean——?" she said, and may I never have the job given St. Peter if questioning souls can express half the agony of mingled doubt and joy in her tones.

"I mean love," he said, and, dropping the sword, he caught her in a crushing, passionate embrace. As I turned away I heard her cry to him: "My king!" in a tone of adoration which was high treason to his sacred majesty.



IN DEFENCE OF HONOR

A STORY OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

By Captain Hector Orme Blanding, U. S. V.

After the suppression of the refractory Indian tribes, the United States soldier found life more or less uneventful till the coming of the war with Spain and the acquirement of our oversea possessions. Since then he has had a chance to see a great deal of active service, and whatever else may be the drawbacks to his existence, monotony has not been one of them. In this original and extremely well written story Captain Blanding gives us a vivid picture of army life in the Philippines. Next month we shall publish a story of railroading.

(*A Complete Story*)

CHAPTER I.

THE OTHER MAN.

LIEUTENANT RICHARD MELLISH, in charge of ordnance stores, station of Ilomanguete, department of the Visayas, should have been checking requisitions. The clerk of ordnance had just placed a pile of these papers before him, and it was Mr. Mellish's duty to go over these carefully and compare them with office requests. There was quite enough work contained in that pile of papers to last Dick Mellish the whole afternoon, and he should have been working at them with a will. Instead of that, he was gloomily contemplating the end of his cigarette, and occasionally staring out of the window.

"All girls are alike," said Mr. Mellish, with the bitterness of twenty-five years, crossed in affections. "All alike," he reiterated, waving his cigarette threateningly at an inoffensive-looking *tao* who paused below to look up at the ordnance windows. "*Caribao!*" muttered Dick, gazing at the *tao* man. The one addressed moved away.

It was a pleasant afternoon, and the view was one to delight the lover of beauty in nature. From where he sat, Dick could note the blue of the ocean, the white of the sanded beach, the sapphire-hued clouds. Palms waved softly in the cool sea breeze, and gorgeous growths in the well-kept gardens opened their petals and drank in the moist air. Mr. Mellish scowled at nature and would appreciate none of her beauties.

The ordnance storehouse, where Mellish had his headquarters, was one of the many buildings comprising Fort Ilario, where the Spaniards had maintained their garrisons before the Americans came. The fort, which was no fort at all, according to our notions, was bounded by walls of mud and stone ten feet high, and had within its inclosure some ten buildings, which the

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Of this series, stories on the following themes have been published: Journalism (January); cotton (February); oil (March); gold-mining (April); finance (May); wheat (June); the navy (July), and cattle raising (August). The back numbers can be secured through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

United States Army had taken over for its own use. The central structure was utilized as general headquarters, and here Colonel Setonhurst, commanding the station, was installed with his adjutant and clerks. The building facing the water front had been given over to the quartermaster's department, and at the wharf, which had been built up in front of it, the occasional insular transports and coast-guard boats laid up while at Ilomanguete. The ordnance storehouse adjoined the quartermaster's department, and was flanked on two other sides by the long, low, barnlike houses which served as barracks for the Seventy-first Regiment, of which Colonel Setonhurst was the commander.

The walls of the fort, adjoining the water front, had long since been destroyed by the Americans, for the reason that they interfered with the view, and set along at regular intervals, surrounded by little gardens, were the officers' quarters. There were only three married officers on the station; the colonel himself was a widower. Two majors had brought their wives with them, the third had left his behind, so that all of the officers save only for the two majors and the colonel occupied the four bungalows on the left of the ordnance quarters. On the right the families of Merton and Sanders held forth, and the colonel's house, the favorite place on the station for the unmarried officers, was presided over by his daughter, April Setonhurst.

It was this same Miss April who was causing Lieutenant Mellish to give forth his rank heresies concerning the other sex. For young Mr. Mellish, although he was not quite sure of it himself, was very much in love with April Setonhurst. The affection of Dick was no sudden fancy of a few months, but a steady growth of years, dating back to the time when Colonel Setonhurst, then a major, had been an instructor at the Point and Dick Mellish a cadet. In those days Dick Mellish had often undergone punishment at the hands of the authorities for breaking bounds, and April had been the cause. They had been good friends then, nothing more, at least so April averred; and it was true that Dick Mellish had never spoken words to lead her to think otherwise. Dick was not a youngster from whom sentiment came with any great amount of grace; and when he had contemplated the fact that he was in love with the little auburn-curled imp, he sternly checked himself and made rude remarks about boys who made fools of themselves.

Nevertheless, when Dick Mellish got his cub lieutenancy, he exerted all the influence which his father, a senator, controlled, and had himself put on the same station with Lieutenant Colonel Setonhurst. Unfortunately for his plans, however, April was sent to college about that time; and Dick was left to contemplate his asininity in the midst of brushwood, sagebrush and alkali. The Spanish-American war banished love from his mind, for he was one of the fortunate ones at Siboney, and later was in one of the provisional governmental regiments.

And now, in 1902, Dick Mellish had willingly given up the pleasures of a station in New York City, and asked to be transferred to far-away Ilomanguete, for no reason in the world except that April Setonhurst was there with her father.

Some further explanation is required in order that the pessimistic remarks of Dick Mellish may be explained. While waiting at Manila for a transport going to Ilomanguete, he had spent much time at the Army and Navy Club, and there, lunching with Major Linborne, a friend of Senator Mellish, he had stated that his detail took him to Ilomanguete.

The major contemplated. "Some nice fellows there," he said. "Setonhurst's a bully good chap—little too stern on questions of duty, but then, perhaps, that isn't a fault. Young Setonhurst's there, too; pity the son isn't more like his father. That lad's sowed a sufficiency of wild oats. He was a cub in my battalion at Fort Worth. Lord! I had trouble with that youngster——"

Jack Setonhurst was three years junior to Dick Mellish, and had been protected by the big New Yorker more

than once for no other reason than that he was April's brother. Dick squirmed and smiled apologetically.

"Jack's a nice boy," he commented. "Dare say he's gotten over that wildness now."

The major snorted. "Well, maybe. But I've heard some tales about him. His father forgets duty where Jack is concerned. But that's neither here nor there, and it's none of my affairs. Ilomanguete—let me see! Yes, by thunder! Lessing is there—Lessing, ah, yes!"

"And who is Lessing, major?" asked Mellish.

"Lessing," said Major Linborne, slowly, "is a scoundrel; that's what he is. But you asked who he is, didn't you? Well, I'll tell you. He was an officer in the Spanish army when Dewey landed his forces in '98. He deserted the Spaniards and came over to us. The tale that he told was that his father was an American and he could not fight against Americans. Well, his father may have been an American, I dare say he was. There are lots of pretty bad Americans—beachcombers—out in this part of the world. But Lessing went on to tell us about the Spanish blue blood of his mother. Maybe, yes; but there was Tagalog mixed up with it—surely. Yes! Well, anyhow, we believed the story and took Lessing on as a scout—useful scout he was, too. Wasn't until two years ago I found out why he deserted the Spaniards. Got into a quarrel with his colonel over the colonel's wife, pretty nearly murdered the colonel, and had to skip for his life. Americans landed about that time. Easy enough for Captain Enrique Lessing—what?"

"Sounds rotten," admitted Mellish. "Maybe the story wasn't true."

"Well, Spanish gentlemen aren't much at lying about things outside themselves; and while I was *attaché* at Madrid last year the story got around pretty frequently. Of course you know the United States wanted to reward Lessing, so they gave him a lieutenancy in a volunteer outfit, and afterward took him into the regular service. He's down at Ilomanguete now. Just thought I'd tell you."

"Thanks," said Mellish. "This story known in the service?"

"Not known at all. Might as well not tell it. Won't do any good. But it's truth. Have another Scotch, my boy."

Mellish contemplated the ginger ale in his glass. "I can't have *another* one, major."

"Oh! I forgot. You're one of the few army men who don't drink and still remain decent fellows. Now, blush, you young rascal! I declare, you're as thin-skinned as a girl."

Dick drank the ginger ale hurriedly, choked over it and tried to laugh.

"Oh, well," he said, apologetically, "we all have our faults, major." Then they laughed, lighted cigarettes and went for a drive on the Luneta.

Dick Mellish, not being of the sort which harbors petty scandals, forgot, for the time, all about Captain Enrique Lessing by the time he had said good-by to the major. He took the transport the following day, and four days later was shaking hands with Colonel Setonhurst and asking after Jack and April.

"April's about somewhere," the colonel had replied. "I think she went for a stroll with my adjutant, Captain Lessing."

"Captain Lessing," repeated Dick, wondering where he had heard the name before. The mere fact that April was out walking with him was sufficient to make the name of Lessing disliked by Lieutenant Richard Mellish. "Captain Lessing!" Then he remembered the story Major Linborne had told. "Oh! I've heard of Captain Lessing," he said, with a scowl.

Colonel Setonhurst noted the scowl. "Now, Richard, my boy, don't start here in this garrison with any absurd prejudices. There are some people who think Captain Lessing was a traitor to the Spaniards. No more mistaken belief could possibly exist. He had an American father, and he refused to fight against his father's people. In consequence of his refusal, he was

court-martialed and locked up; but he managed to escape and join our forces. He was of great value to the service during the troubles; and he has won his position fairly. I tell you this because I think very highly of Lessing, and I don't want you to be prejudiced against him. Because, of course, you know, Dick, that I value your services and your friendship for your own sake as well as your father's."

This was a long speech for the colonel to make, and Dick could see, without any great amount of perception, that the colonel thought highly indeed of Enrique Lessing. Dick was not the man to prejudice anyone, so he smiled and said he hoped that Lessing and he would get along well together.

"You see, I've never met the man," he explained, hastily. "But, naturally, when a man hears tales about another man from people who ought to know, he forms his own opinions. But if you think well of him, colonel——"

A little later Jack Setonhurst came in and greeted Dick effusively. Young Setonhurst had every reason to think well of this tall, broad-shouldered, ingenuous-faced Mellish, for Dick had been his champion during Jack's cub days at the Point, and had taken upon his own shoulders the blame for several escapades of the irrepressible Setonhurst.

Before Dick had chatted long with Jack he found that Lessing had found a friend in him, also. Young Setonhurst was full to the brim of the many and varied good qualities of Henry—formerly Enrique—Lessing. "Sister thinks a lot of him, too," continued Setonhurst, sticking barbs in Mellish without knowing it. "Lord, yes! The other fellows don't care so much for him—Lockwood and that lot. Jealousy, I call it. Wonderful how the fellows do take to sis. Can't say they would if they knew her as well as I do. Bad temper that girl has. She surely has, Dick. You know."

Yes, Dick knew very well; but he did not put the same construction on it that Dick did. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Jack," cried Mellish, indignantly. "What the devil do you mean by saying that about your sister? He'll be a lucky man that she —takes to." Dick blushed and fumbled with his swagger stick.

Setonhurst grinned broadly. "Oh, say, Dick, you haven't got it, too? I say, that is a good one."

Mellish faced him heatedly. "Now, you see here, Jack Setonhurst. Let that drop, you understand? You let it drop. I've known April a long time, and you know I think lots of her. But don't you come around with your—your——"

Setonhurst became pacific. "Oh, that's all right, Dick," he said. "I was only chaffing, you know."

"Oh, all right, then," said Dick, somewhat appeased. He looked out of the window. "By thunder! here comes April now. Is that Lessing with her?"

April was glad to see Dick, and she made no hesitation in saying so, while he held her hands and kissed her lightly on the cheek as he had done from boyhood days. "Mr. Mellish is just like another brother to me," she explained to the erect, sunburned fellow who twirled his stick and looked on politely. "This is Captain Lessing, Mr. Mellish." Dick swung around and the two men faced each other.

And from that moment Dick Mellish decided to dislike Lessing very much; and Lessing, noting Dick's broad shoulders and obstinate jaw, made a mental note that here was a young man who would bear watching.

When Dick had returned to his quarters and was getting out his traps, he muttered much to himself: "Just like a brother, indeed! I like that. Yes, I like that. Can't see what she sees in that brute. Now, hang it, I can't."

All this had happened four months before the afternoon when Dick Mellish sat at his desk in the ordnance office and made cynical remarks about women. Since their first meeting, Dick had watched Lessing and April Setonhurst, and had noted, with a great deal of bitterness, that Lessing was by way of monopolizing the society of the colonel's daughter. Dick had stood three

weeks of this, then had written Major Linborne asking him for a written confirmation of what he had told him; if possible, a letter from one of the officers in Madrid who had told Linborne the story.

"Of course I'm in love with her," Dick said, when he posted the letter. "But if Lessing was a decent fellow, I'd be content to take what came my way. But I can't see April deceived by a man who's been guilty of two very rotten things. It's only fair that she should know."

Where Mellish made his mistake was in failing to give Lessing a hard fight for the companionship of April. But Dick, ever the most modest of men, had decided that April looked on him as a member of the family, and expected a different sort of affection from the sort Dick wanted to give her. Therefore, Dick did not set himself up as a rival of Lessing, but sat by and scowled. This he had been doing since he came to Ilomanguete. He was still doing it on this particular afternoon.

He had seen them pass on horseback, evidently headed for the road between Ilomanguete and Jario, a ride of six miles through a tropical forest, cool and shady. The sight of them on pleasure bent had soured Lieutenant Mellish on his work.

"All girls are alike," he repeated. Somehow the pessimism seemed to comfort him. "They want some fellow to act as though he were a stage hero. Romance, that's what they want. It's the fault of these cursed novels and plays and matinée idols. Huh! Romance, that's what they want!" He flung away his cigarette and lighted another. "Suppose she thinks Lessing is romantic. Well, the beggar has got that Don Juan style about him. Hanged if I like it, though. Anyhow, he's a rascal. Why in the devil don't Linborne answer my letter? He's had time enough."

As though in answer to his question, a thin line of smoke became visible out in the channel. Dick picked up his binoculars and leveled them on the line of smoke. "That's a transport. See the stripes on her funnel. *Sherman,* I guess. Oh, well, it doesn't matter to me. Other fellows have sweethearts at home and get letters from them."

Dick laid down the binoculars and began to work on the requisitions. Once started, he worked with care and regularity. He was very accurate, was Dick, and wholly concentrated. Several hours passed, and he pushed the requisitions back, finished and signed.

"Aqui, muchacho," he said to the barefooted messenger who was dozing in the corner. "Take these over to the *coronel* and have them signed." He spoke in Spanish. *"Sabe?"*

The *muchacho,* rubbing the sleepiness from his eyes, picked up the papers gingerly. *"Si, señor,"* he agreed, and took his way leisurely toward general headquarters.

The sunset of the tropics was upon the land, and the west was shot with streaks of blood-red, spreading fanlike over the horizon, and giving a quiet, restful glow to eyes wearied of the blazing yellow sun. The sky was changing from ultramarine and sapphire to little cloudlets of pink and mother-of-pearl, floating gently toward the pale white disk of a crescent moon which rode timidly in the wake of the great orb of day. It was the time of day when rest came, even rest of mind; and Dick Mellish lighted a cigarette and gazed on the wonderful metamorphosis with kindly eyes.

"Don't get sunsets like this at home," he remarked, and blew clouds of smoke toward the sea. He was awakened from his thoughts by the messenger, who returned with the requisitions, and also announced that the mail from the transport had been distributed, and that the ordnance portion was in his hands.

"Now, that's funny," said Dick. "I forgot all about that transport." He looked toward the quartermaster's wharf, where the steamer with its striped funnel lay to. "Let's have the mail, boy."

He took the packet from the *muchacho* and quickly separated the official mail from the personal mail. He had no difficulty in identifying his correspondents. "That's from sister," he

said, throwing down a creamy white envelope. "That's from Jim Dean. That's father's. Guess he sent a check. That's a bill from the army tailor in Manila. That a notice of dues from the Army and Navy Club, and that—who in the devil is that from?"

He tore open the envelope to find out. "Why, it's from Linborne," he said. "It's from Linborne. By Cæsar, it is!" He read eagerly, and turned from the letter itself to the inclosure, a letter written in Spanish and signed with an unfamiliar name.

"Well, I'll be hanged," he said, helplessly, as the papers fell from his hand. "Well, I'll be hanged. He ought to be kicked out of the army. He ought, by Cæsar!"

He turned to the *muchacho*. "Boy," he said, "you *sabe* Captain Lessing, *si?* Then you go ask him to come here. Tell him I want to see him—very important matter. *Vete fuera pronto,* now." The boy ambled toward the door. *"Apurate! caribao!"* shouted Dick. The *muchacho* vanished hastily.

When the boy had gone, Dick Mellish picked up the letter again and read it slowly; then he translated the Spanish inclosure still more slowly, for he was not an excellent Spanish scholar. Grim lines settled about Dick's boyish mouth, and a steady scowl formed.

"Why, the fellow is an utter scoundrel," he said. "Well, maybe that isn't my business. But he's got to get transferred! If April loves a decent fellow, why, that's not my affair. But I can't see her inveigled into a match with a cad like this fellow. No, that's my business. He'll have to get transferred."

It was getting a trifle dark now, but Mellish could distinguish Lessing's form as he passed the window and went into the storehouse. A moment later his voice rang out pleasantly: "Are you about, Mellish? I hear you have something important on."

Dick flooded the room with the light from the electric arcs. "Yes, so I have, captain," he said, slowly. "I have something very important to tell you—something very important—to you. Sit down, won't you?"

CHAPTER II.

LESSING LAUGHS.

Mellish had arisen when Lessing came in, and now he indicated a chair for his visitor. Lessing sank into it, and took a cigarette from the box on Mellish's table. Mellish did likewise, but did not sit down.

"I dare say you think it's rather presumptuous for one below you in rank to ask you to come to his office," said Mellish, staring at Lessing. "But I'm afraid you'll have to overlook that. I don't want you to imagine that there's anything trivial about this, because there isn't; and it's a matter that means a lot to you, captain."

Lessing smiled amiably and knocked the ashes from his cigarette. "All right, Mr. Mellish," he said. "I'm here to listen to you."

"I didn't ask you to my quarters, nor did I want to come to yours," pursued Dick. "Because this is a question that couldn't be discussed by me either as host or as guest. You see, I rather think you'll say I've insulted you, captain."

"Well, don't apologize," smiled Lessing. "Go ahead and say what you're going to say. I have a dinner appointment at the colonel's."

Dick paused for a moment, then took two steps toward the window and two steps back. "I've never pretended any friendship for you, captain, because I haven't any friendship to give. Frankly, I don't like you."

"That's interesting, but not important," commented Lessing, still smiling. "I hope you haven't had me over here to tell me that. If there's any satisfaction for you in it, I might say that you are not quite the sort I'd pick out for a friend myself. Now we understand one another. Drive ahead."

"I'm going to," said Dick. "I'm going right to the point." He threw away his cigarette and stared intently at Lessing. "You were at one time in the Spanish army, captain?"

Lessing nodded carelessly.

"You served under Colonel Reyes y Mendoza about the time that Dewey

won his victory, and had a love affair with the Señora Reyes y Mendoza."

Lessing's black eyes dilated and his pupils seemed little points of fire. "Now, Mellish," he said, slowly, "be very careful about what you say."

"I'm going to," said Dick, steadily. "I'm going to tell you nothing except what I know to be the truth. I've got proof for everything I say. I want you to listen, that's all."

"I'll try to satisfy you," returned Lessing. "I'll listen. It's not worth while quarreling with a jealous youngster."

Dick compressed his lips and turned over the papers in his hand. "Colonel Mendoza became cognizant of the affair between you and his wife; and he called you to account for it one day when not entirely sober. He had hardly said more than a few words when you drew your sword and ran him through. Luckily you didn't kill him, but the intention was there, just the same. You thought yourself unobserved, but a servant of the colonel's gave witness against you; and you were arrested and confined in Fort Santiago. You managed to escape in some way, and joined the Americans, telling them quite a different tale to the real one. Now, that's all I know, Captain Lessing."

Lessing breathed heavily for a few minutes before speaking. Then he lifted his eyes and regarded Mellish steadily. "I have a perfect right to thrash you for what you've said," he remarked, coldly. "Unfortunately, for the moment, we both wear the same uniform, and the service frowns on brawls between its officers. But if you dare to repeat that tale to anyone——"

"I am not a scandalmonger," retorted Mellish, lighting another cigarette. "And I don't care whether the government knows about this or not. Neither have I any desire to ruin you. You may have reformed, for all I know. But there is one thing that must cease, and I say *must* advisedly. You must cease your attentions to Miss Setonhurst, and make an early bid to be transferred to some other station. My father is a senator, and I can have the desired transfer made without any trouble. This you must do."

Lessing laughed amusedly. "You must be a fool, Mellish," he said.

"No, I'm not, exactly. You see, I have here a letter from Colonel Reyes y Mendoza—his wife committed suicide when you left, and he quitted the service. He is ready to do all he can to pay you back in your own coin. I have here his sworn statement, sent me by Major Linborne, who was military *attaché* in Madrid until last year. Major Linborne has consented to keep the matter quiet for the honor of the service, unless you refuse to accede to what I have proposed."

"Let me see the letter," sad Lessing.

It was Mellish's turn to laugh now, and he did so. "I would be a fool if I did that, wouldn't I?" he laughed. "No, wait until I have made a typewritten copy, then I'll let you read that. But rest content, captain, the evidence is here. I shall make no use of it if you make your application for transfer and leave this station. But I cannot have a man like you paying attention to Miss Setonhurst."

"And in case I refuse to do what you ask me to do?" inquired Lessing.

"Oh, in that case," returned Mellish, "I shall put these letters in the hand of Colonel Setonhurst and tell him to do what he likes about the matter. I'll warrant he does lots more than forbid you to associate with his daughter."

Lessing laughed again, and became silent. He looked about him as though planning some way of escape from the dilemma in which he found himself. Mellish noted that his ears were set forward unpleasantly, and that his upper lip was very long and reminiscent of the animal. Otherwise Lessing was a remarkably handsome, well set-up and well groomed fellow. Mellish was beginning to feel a trifle sorry for him. He took his punishment like a gentleman, at any rate.

"Well," said Lessing, after a long pause, "I don't suppose it would convince you in the slightest should I deny *in toto* every statement you have made.

You wouldn't believe me, therefore it's useless to waste breath on the matter. Granting for the moment that what you say is capable of being proved by people who are my enemies, it is not hard to see that if this matter was taken up officially by the colonel it might mean a lot to me that I would rather not have it mean. But I want to think the matter over. How long will you give me?"

"How long would you like?" inquired Mellish.

"A week, say—now, that isn't much. Besides, if I am to be transferred, I've got to look over the matter and try to determine what station I want to take. Eh? That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"You may have your week, captain," said Mellish. "But you must avoid Miss Setonhurst during that time."

Lessing reflected. "I can't promise you that," he said, easily. "It's not easy to avoid a girl who pesters one to death with her attentions. I wish I hadn't mixed up with the girl at all, now. Because I chose to amuse myself, I've incurred the jealousy of——"

"Do you mean to say—to tell me that"—Dick was trembling with rage—"that April Setonhurst loves you?"

"I do mean to say it. Positively worries me sometimes. I——"

There was a sharp crack. Dick Mellish's fingermarks were visible on Henry Lessing's cheek. Lessing started to his feet, his arm upraised, a furious curse on his lips, the other hand tugging at his revolver.

Dick Mellish was on him in a moment, his huge muscles expanding while he shook Lessing until the man gasped for breath. "You cad!" Dick cried, furiously. "You cad!" He choked in his anger. "You dare to come here and tell me that she loves you! Why, it's she who has been playing with you, not you with her. Take it back, take it back, I say!"

Lessing was powerless in the furious clutch of the young giant. "I—I'll report you for this, Mellish. You've struck your superior officer. I'll have you under arrest before the night's over."

The rage had died down in Dick and given place to a cold, furious scorn. "Well, have me arrested, then," he said. "Have me arrested. I'll tell them I struck you. I'm not a liar. Tell them all about it. I won't tell them why. I was sorry for you a minute ago, sorry I had to do this. Now I haven't the slightest compunction. I'll give you three days to decide in. If in that time I find you with Miss Setonhurst, I'll thrash you, and thrash you well. I'll take the consequences, and so will you. Three days I'll give you, Lessing. Now please get out of my office."

Lessing did not look at Mellish. His face was flushed and his eyes gleamed. Quietly he went out of the office and down the stairs. He paused for a minute.

"Three days," he whispered. "I don't need that much time to do for you, Mellish. I don't need that much time. No, that's too much. You'll pay very dearly for that slap, Lieutenant Mellish, yes, very dearly indeed. Oh, you young cub, you'll pay—you'll pay!"

Evidently the thought of his intentions quieted him, for he laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh. Then he turned down toward the beach.

"Oh, you'll pay, young Mellish," he said again.

CHAPTER III.

HER RECKLESS YOUNG BROTHER.

When Dick Mellish was again master of his emotions, he locked up the ordnance storeroom, and went downstairs and out on the grounds. He paused for a moment to lock the outer doors, then crossed the quadrangle to his quarters, where he removed his khaki uniform, had a cold tub and arrayed himself in another uniform of white drill.

At the mess table he did not indicate by his actions that anything of particular import had happened. He laughed at the others' witticisms, and wished that he held the power within himself to be witty, too; but he knew he hadn't.

The fact that he was not an especially brilliant person had long since ceased to worry Dick Mellish. He was quite sure that he had not been portioned off any great amount of brains; and his attitude, while not apologetic to those who had, held in it a certain deference.

Dick Mellish was, and always had been, especially loved by those with whom he associated. There was something about the huge fellow with his frank, ingenuous face and splendid consideration for the rights of others which endeared him to those with whom he happened to be brought in contact. Dick was a man wholly without conceit, lamentably without it, perhaps. He did not know that his splendid physique and handsome face had been the envy of many thousands who had looked upon him; nor did he realize that his indomitable resolution to do those things which came to hand with all the power that was within him made up for the lack of that readiness of tongue and quickness of brain which he so much admired in others.

But perhaps the desire to make comfortable those about him had more to do with his popularity than anything else. There were many men who were indebted to Dick Mellish in more ways than one. People inevitably sought him out as a confidant; and he had the kindliest way of doing favors that a man might have; it almost approximated the position of being gratified at being allowed to help a friend.

In the case of April Setonhurst, Dick's solicitude for her welfare was utterly without personal feeling. He had long ago made up his mind that he was not worthy to be yoked to this springtime sprite, whose witcheries of body and mind set her apart, in his mind, from all possibilities of love for a big, hulking fellow who only knew how to do his duty. Loving April as he did, however, he was determined that when she did marry, she should not be mated to a man unworthy of her, as he knew Lessing to be; nor did he deem for a moment that April's regard for Lessing went further than a passing infatuation of the sort which young girls cherish for the matinée idol of the day.

Mellish could realize Lessing's fascination, because Lessing possessed some of those very qualities so lacking in Dick Mellish. Lessing was always urbane and debonair, unruffled by what might reduce Dick to babbling clumsiness. He had in his personality that Byronic note which stands for romanticism, and which gives the elusive impression that, in the person possessing it, there lingers the strain of the cavalier of years gone by. His speech unstudied, flowing and graceful; his bearing *insouciant;* his appearance elegant with studied carelessness—all these went to make up a personality which Mellish could understand to be more than agreeable.

Mellish finished his coffee, lighted a cigarette and quitted the mess room, striking across the beach again, in the direction of the colonel's house. Whatever Dick may have lacked, single-purposedness was not one of his failures, and he remembered that Lessing had said something about a dinner engagement at the colonel's.

"If he kept it, I'll hand the colonel the papers without delay," muttered Dick. "Yes. Can't let it go on. It's not fair to April."

He scowled and entered the garden, from which he went through the arched carriageway and into the *patio.* Here he ascended the outside steps to the overhanging garden. Like most houses of Spanish build, the colonel's residence was built around a square court, and the second-story, inner windows faced a stone balcony, which ran around the four sides of the *patio,* and which was beautified by crawling creepers and tropical growths. Electric lights, inclosed in arcs of red, threw a subdued light over the old gray wall, bright with the clinging vines and flowers, and the blue of the tropical sky, blazing with silver stars and gray-pearl moon, served to give an effect almost unreal, so harmoniously beautiful was it.

Dick was a privileged guest, and he did not trouble to send in for anyone,

but threw himself into a steamer chair, full length, and puffed at his cigarette, blowing clouds of smoke into the warmly languorous air. He sat for some time in silence, and only looked up when seized with a conviction that some human was near by.

A girl, whose auburn curls clustered about a very white brow, whose reddish-brown eyes were looking at him demurely from under sweeping lashes, was laughing at him and showing very white, very even teeth in so doing. She was in a dinner gown of filmy blue, and her pink and white arms and shoulders were delicately shadowed by the ruddy light from the electric arcs. She stood, inclined slightly forward, her slender young body swaying to a tune which some one was playing somewhere in the distance, her hands clasped behind her back, and her eyes fixed on Dick Mellish.

For a moment Dick stared at her, not saying anything, almost afraid to speak. Her smile grew more merry. Dick began to blush furiously, and he scrambled to his feet with an apologetic air.

"I say, April," he began, diffidently, "do you know, you look stunning? The whole thing don't seem quite real. Do you know, for a minute I was thinking I was in a theater? All this is like a stage scene, anyhow, isn't it?"

April Setonhurst dropped into another chair. "Who would suspect you of romance, Dick?" she smiled. "Dear old practical Dickie Mellish! I was just wondering what you were thinking about as you sat there staring up at the sky and not seeing anything, apparently. Now, 'fess up, Dick; what were you thinking about? The building of a wing to the ordnance office? That's like you."

Dick was quite accustomed to the opinion that he was eminently practical and everyday. "Oh, I don't know," he said, awkwardly. "Really, I don't believe I was thinking about the ordnance office at all." He paused for a moment, then his tone became slightly nettled. "I say, April, you know I'm not *always* thinking about my work. But you know I'm not clever, like some of the fellows, and I have to take more time for thought than they do. Some people get through things so easily. I don't. You know that. But I don't *always* think about my work." His tone was almost petulant.

April Setonhurst laughed; a very musical laugh it was, but Dick Mellish was growing to wish that she would not laugh at him. "She always finds something humorous in what I do," he often complained to himself. "Lord! I'm not such an awful ass as to be forever doing fool things."

"Through dinner?" he queried, breaking the silence that followed. She nodded. "Have anybody up here?"

"Tom Bell is here, and Lucy Sanders came over with the major. Captain Lessing was to have come, but he sent a note pleading a bad headache. Rather unfortunate, wasn't it?"

"Yes," agreed Dick. "Unfortunate for him, and yet, in a way, fortunate." Dick was enjoying the opportunity of being subtle.

"He's a brilliant fellow," commented April, swinging one white-shod foot and silk-stockinged ankle to and fro from out a mass of white and fluffiness. "He isn't narrow. That's what I dislike about army people so very much; they get to thinking that there is nothing on earth worth while except being in the service."

She regarded Dick meditatively. "Oh, well, you know, April, old girl," he said, apologetically, "one has one's work, and it takes such a lot of time. But I've been reading those books you spoke about—that Belgian man: Maeterlinck—you said you liked him. I had them sent on from Manila. He's rather deep, isn't he? I've been reading him pretty carefully. He means a lot, but it takes time to find out what he does mean—lots of time." He smiled diffidently. "It takes me more time than others, maybe; but I'm getting him straightened out pretty well now. You and I'll have a talk about——"

"Hullo, Dick." Jack Setonhurst strolled into the circle of light. "Glad you came over. I was just going to look you up."

There was a strange note in Jack Setonhurst's voice—yet not exactly a strange one, because both of his auditors had heard it before. Jack Setonhurst was as easy to divine as a printed page. His tone indicated that his mind was troubled.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked April, quickly. "You've been glum all evening. You talk like the third act of a tragedy. Didn't you get a letter today in the States' mail budget. Has she——"

"Now, see here, April," said her brother, querulously. "I don't feel like joking to-night. I wish you'd be serious sometimes. Hang it all——"

April arose, still smiling. "Well, I don't feel like being serious to-night. Tell your troubles to Dick. He's always serious; and, besides, he's been reading Maeterlinck." She caught up her fluffy skirts and moved away. "You can come back when you're tired of being serious, Dick," she called over her shoulder.

Her brother sank into the chair which she had left unoccupied. "Yes, I wanted to see you badly, Dick," he said. "I want to have a talk with you."

His companion's sympathies had been stirred by the hopeless tone which Setonhurst used. "Something wrong, old fellow?" he asked. "Well, I'm sorry. Can I help?"

"I don't know," replied the younger man. "Let's have a stroll on the beach, will you?" He picked up his cap from a little table, and got up from his seat. Mellish did the same, and the two wended their way down the stairs and out into the open. Jack did not speak until they had passed out of earshot of the officers' quarters. Then, a few rods from the high-water mark, he flung himself face downward on the white-sanded beach, and hid his face in his hands. For some time Dick listened to his self-suppressed groans, and patiently awaited the confidences which he knew would follow. Dick was vaguely unquiet by now. He had pulled Jack Setonhurst out of scrapes before, and he had an idea that this was one which would need a great deal of pulling.

Presently Jack turned and rested his head on his palm. He eyed Mellish moodily. "I'm in the very devil of a hole," he said, with a half sob. Jack was almost womanish in his hours of contrition. "Oh, this is a most particularly devilish hole I've gotten myself into—hang my luck!"

"Well, Jack," said Mellish, very gently, "it doesn't do any good to wail about it. What's the matter, anyhow?"

"I suppose you'll leave me when I tell you," said Setonhurst, morosely. "I've done something that's pretty awful this time. Well, I'll tell you; no mincing. I'm a thief, that's all. I've used up two thousand dollars of government money, and the pay inspector is due here from Iloilo next week. That'll be the end of Assistant Paymaster Setonhurst, all right. Yes, that'll be the end of him!"

Setonhurst was watching Mellish's face for some sign of disgust. He saw only pity there, and continued, savagely:

"Ask me how I got rid of it. I'll tell you. Same old trouble—cards, cards, always that. I'm not fit to be a paymaster. I can't be trusted with money that isn't my own——"

"Oh, dry up about that, Jack," said Mellish, suddenly. "It isn't worth while. I'll get you out of the scrape." He paused a minute. "Maybe it's for your—father's sake. Maybe——"

Jack Setonhurst sat up suddenly. "What do you mean, Dick Mellish? How are you going to get me out of a scrape like that? How are you——"

Mellish took Jack's hand and shook it. "You've been an awful little fool, as usual, Jack. And you'll have to get out of the pay corps as soon as you decently can. Ask for a transfer back to the line. I know you didn't mean to do this, and I know you're going to say that it'll never happen again. But you've said that too many times, Jack. I'll fix up matters this time. Now, don't worry about it any more. Let's go back to the place."

Jack Setonhurst gripped both hands of his friend. "Dick Mellish!" he said. "There never was such a good friend as you are. By Heaven! I'll never forget this!"

"Oh, I say, now, Jack," broke in Mellish, awkwardly, "cut that out, please. I suppose you're grateful, and all that sort of thing. But it's all right. It's all right. Now look, you say that two thousand will cover the deficit?"

"It's not quite that," said Setonhurst.

"All right—all right. I say, I don't believe I'll go back to your place. I've got some work, anyhow. You run along, Jack. I'll see you to-morrow. And don't you worry. Good-night."

He turned suddenly and strode off in an opposite direction. Jack Setonhurst stood watching him for some time, then drew a big sigh of relief.

"What a fine fellow he is!" Jack cried. "Oh, what he has done for me to-night!"

Such natures as Setonhurst's shift responsibility easily. Jack did not question the manner in which Mellish intended to make good his deficit. He knew that he could depend on Dick's word, and thought no more about the matter for the time being. Before Mellish had been out of his sight for five minutes, Setonhurst was whistling a *rigadon,* and thinking about a girl named Juliet, who lived in San Francisco, and who was to marry him when he got his captaincy.

The next morning a cablegram was filed in the office of the signal corps by Lieutenant Richard Mellish. It read:

SENATOR MELLISH, New York City.
Wire two thousand dollars my credit, Wayfong, Manila. Please rush.
RICHARD.

While the cablegram lay on the table before the signal sergeant, Captain Lessing entered the telegraph office. It was not a hard matter for him to read the cablegram. When he had attended to his own mission, he quitted the office, his brows wrinkled in thought.

"Now, I wonder why Mellish wants two thousand dollars," he asked himself. "I wonder if he is in a hole. I'd like to know about that."

CHAPTER IV.

A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

For some reason unknown to Lieutenant Whitmarsh, in charge of the signal corps, the adjutant of the station took a sudden interest in the work of that corps. The following morning found Lessing at the office of the telegraph division, and, after a few words with Whitmarsh, he began to interest himself in the work of the operators. It so happened that, as he watched, he noted that a personal telegram was received for Lieutenant Richard Mellish. Without apparent concern, he managed to read this cablegram. It ran as follows:

RICHARD MELLISH, Lieutenant,
Ilomanguete.
Cannot spare the money at present time. Entangled in stock deals. FATHER.

After having read this telegram, Lessing's interest in signal corps work waned, and he left the office in the wake of the messenger who carried the message to Mellish. Lessing lounged about in the shade of the ordnance storehouse, and was soon rewarded with a sight of Mellish, who emerged from the storehouse and made his way over to the pay division. Lessing followed him leisurely, and arrived at Setonhurst's office a little later. He tapped on the door, which was opened by the colonel's son. Jack's face was pale and his eyes were staring. Mellish looked embarrassed, and soon after Lessing's arrival went away. Lessing noted that a crumpled cable form lay on the floor.

"I'm not very busy to-day," Lessing explained, as he lounged in a chair and watched Setonhurst furtively. "So I'm looking about. But I say, Setonhurst, you're looking pretty rocky. What's the matter?"

Jack turned a pair of lusterless eyes on him. "Oh, I am rocky," he said. "A good deal more than that. A good deal more than that, Lessing."

Lessing hitched his chair a trifle

closer and eyed him speculatively. "Well, you've done me the honor to call me your friend," he hinted, gently. "What's the use of a friend if he can't help you to share your burdens? Can I help you in any way, Jack?"

Setonhurst lifted his haggard face for the second time. "No, no, I don't think you can," he said, wretchedly. "I don't think anyone can help me. I don't believe anyone wants to help me." He buried his head in his hands and gave vent to several groans. Jack Setonhurst, like all weak-willed persons, saw nothing but injustice in the fact that he should have to pay the penalty for that weakness which resulted in crime.

Dick Mellish had just tumbled his air castle down for the present by showing him the cablegram. But Dick had asserted his intention to scrape the money together before the time for inspection came. "I don't know just how I'll do it," he explained; "but I'll get it for you somehow, Jack."

But Jack, who saw no possible way save getting it through Mellish's father, was not comforted by this assertion. He had not expected Senator Mellish to refuse his son the money requested. He was a rich man, and could afford to let Dick have it. Now that he had refused, Jack saw no road of escape. How could Dick expect to raise the money in any other way? No, there was but one thing left; he must confess to his father, the colonel, and face his bitter wrath, his paternal curse, and the obligation of leaving the service forever. His father would not allow him to remain in his place after what had happened. He would save the family name from disgrace, but he would be merciless to the offender.

Lessing watched Setonhurst's actions with some contempt. He had never held April's brother in any great estimation, but had found it policy to cultivate his friendship for obvious reasons; as a friend of Jack's, he might come to the house much oftener than as a friend of April's.

"Well, if you'd rather not tell me, of course——" Lessing moved toward the door; but as he did so, he laid his hand lightly on a memorandum sheet covered with figures, which he thrust into his pocket after a brief scrutiny.

Jack raised his eyes again. "You'll keep my secret?" he asked, suddenly.

"Of course," assented Lessing. He put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "I'd like to help you, Jack."

"Well, maybe you can," the boy spoke, recklessly. "I doubt if you will, because I can't give you any reasons. I want two thousand dollars. I've got to have it. I can't tell you why, but I've got to have it before the day after to-morrow. It's nerve, it's foolishness, to tell you. I don't expect you to do anything. I don't see how you can."

Setonhurst stared at Lessing, whose brows were wrinkled in thought. For nearly five minutes neither spoke; then a smile came over Lessing's face—it was not a pleasant smile.

"I think I can help you, Jack," he said, slowly. "In truth, I'm quite sure I can help you. Give me time to reflect. Will you be here to-night—at the office? I expect you will, since you've got your accounts to make up for the month."

"Well, yes, I will be here," assented Jack Setonhurst. "But for Heaven's sake, old man, don't say anything to anyone about this affair. I have my own reasons for being secret about it."

"No fear," said Lessing. "I'll be mum. Well, suppose we say nine-thirty. I'll be here about that time—what do you say, eh?"

"Thank you, old man." A light of hope gleamed in Jack's eyes. He was shifting the responsibility again. "Do you really think you can pull me out of this hole?" he asked, eagerly. "Don't lead me to suppose you will, and then——"

Lessing eyed him sternly. "See here, young Setonhurst," he said, abruptly, "I'm a man of my word. I have every reason to suppose that I can pull you out of this muddle without any particular difficulty. I've got to review the situation a bit. Well, then, at nine-thirty I'll be here at your office."

He quitted the room before Setonhurst could thank him, and went direct-

ly to his own quarters. Once there, he pulled out the slip of paper he had picked up on Setonhurst's table.

Lessing studied the figures carefully, also the hieroglyphics; he made out the latter to be "Medical Stores," "Ordnance," "Commissary" and other names of departments; opposite each were set certain figures, and a sum total made. From this sum total were subtracted sums to the extent of one thousand eight hundred and thirty dollars, against which was scrawled "Deficit" —many times.

An ugly smile played about Lessing's lips. The figures and the hieroglyphics made perfectly plain to him the reason for Setonhurst's so anxiously desiring the two thousand dollars.

He tore the paper into little strips and went out again. This time he took his way across to the bungalow where Mellish had his quarters, along with other officers. One of these was now reposing in bed with a broken leg, and Lessing told the servants not to bother; that he would find the room himself. He went up and came down after some half hour's stay.

When work was over for the day, Dick Mellish left the storehouse and returned to his quarters. A note on the dressing table attracted his attention. He opened it. It was typewritten:

> DEAR DICK: Come to my office at 9:15. I shall be working and want your advice. Don't fail me. JACK SETONHURST.

Mellish tore the note up and threw it into his waste-paper basket. "Why doesn't he stop worrying himself sick?" he asked himself, wearily. "I told him I'd get him out of this. Why can't he trust me? Good Lord!"

When he had eaten his dinner, he sat down to play poker with the other officers of the mess, but gave up his hand when told that Lessing wanted to speak to him. He crossed the living room and found Lessing on the veranda.

"I've come about that personal matter," said Lessing. "And I again ask you to give me a month in which to make my arrangements. I can't do the thing in three days. I——"

"Captain Lessing," said Mellish, very coldly, "you have had my ultimatum. Nothing is going to change me in this matter. You will make your application to be transferred to-morrow, or I shall place the papers I hold in the hands of Colonel Setonhurst."

"You refuse to consider- - -"

"I refuse to consider anything. You will pardon me if I do not discuss the situation further. Good-night." He turned and went back to the living room.

Lessing watched him disappear into the shadows. Then he laughed noiselessly, and went away.

The card game was soon broken up, for two of the officers had visits to make that night. The other three sprawled about lazily. Dick glanced at the clock and saw it was nearly nine o'clock. He picked up a magazine and read it without particular interest, in a few minutes throwing it down and pulling on his blouse and his cap.

"You look worried, Dickie," commented Whitmarsh, lazily. "What's the matter?"

Dick turned on him impatiently. "Good Lord, Whitmarsh, I'm not worried. Let a fellow alone, won't you?" Without further words, he stalked out of the room.

"Can't think what's gotten into Dickie the last few days," commented Lockwood. "He's been cross as a bear."

"Well, I've got a pretty fair idea," said Whitmarsh. "Dick's up against it for money. I suppose that's violating the secrets of the confessional—in other words, the secrets of the telegraph wire —but it doesn't get any further than you, I know. Dick wired his father for two thousand, and the old gentleman turned it down. I remember checking the cablegrams, because they cost Dick a pretty penny."

"Wonder what Dick wants two thousand for," said Lockwood, lazily. "He doesn't drink; he doesn't play cards much; he doesn't run after petticoats."

"Lord knows," confessed Whitmarsh, without much interest. "You can never tell about people like Dickie Mellish, When they do go in for wildness, they

go in for it strong. Why, you remember young Tuthill at San Antonio—regular Sunday-school boy, that lad, but——"

Whereupon, the story of young Tuthill's awful asininity came up for discussion; and Mellish's affairs were dismissed.

Dick was a person of much punctuality; and, as Setonhurst had set nine-fifteen as the hour, he did not wish to get there before that time. He loafed about the beach for a few minutes, admiring the Southern Cross and thinking of April Setonhurst; then, noting from his watch that it was ten minutes after nine, he set off for the paymaster's office, which was at the end of the inclosure, and was surrounded by palms and betel trees.

It was very quiet at that end of the fort. Not even the tramp of a sentry broke the silence of the night. A light gleamed in the windows of Jack's office, and the outer door of the building was ajar. Dick rapped lightly, and then loudly when no answer came. Still no answer, and Dick decided that Jack was asleep. He pushed open the door and entered the darkness of the outer office, from which he passed to the corridor opening on Jack's office. He rapped at this door. He was rewarded with no answer again, and he pushed the door open impatiently.

As he stood blinking in the sudden light, he noted that Jack was sitting with his back to the door, his head on the desk. Then Dick saw that there was something peculiar about Jack's attitude; that his arms were sprawling out in a very queer, stiff fashion.

He moved a step closer, and saw something red on the desk. It seemed wet. In a moment he was seized with a vague fear. Had Jack killed himself?

Mellish sprang to the side of the young paymaster, and looked down at the blood-bespattered papers. His eyes took in the fact that the safe was open and that the lock had been picked.

Puzzled and bewildered, Dick Mellish passed his hand over his brow; then he looked around the room. It seemed to have been the scene of a struggle. Two chairs were overturned, a bottle of ink was broken, and the black fluid made little rivulets on the polished floor. Papers were scattered everywhere.

Dick moved to the safe, and saw that the tin boxes of papers were on the floor, and in confusion. A few stray gold coins and notes were among them.

Dick, not comprehending yet, went again to Jack's side, and felt for the heartbeats. He could feel a faint movement.

Lessing, walking in the direction of the paymaster's office, came across Whitmarsh and Lockwood strolling arm and arm.

"Where are you going, captain?" asked Whitmarsh, pleasantly.

"Why, I had an appointment to take a row with young Setonhurst," answered Lessing. "We were going to take Miss April along, but the young beggar's shut himself up over his accounts. Come along and help me rout him out."

"Oh, all right. Er—I say, Lessing, there's no objection to adding to the party, is there?"

"None in the world," replied Lessing, promptly. "But let's hurry. I don't want to keep Miss April waiting."

The three moved rapidly toward Setonhurst's office. Lessing entered without knocking, and the two men followed him. Their canvas-shod feet made no noise on the smooth boards, and they passed into the building, down the corridor, and threw open the door of Setonhurst's office.

"Good God!" cried Lessing.

As he spoke, Dick Mellish looked up and faced them. There was blood on his hands, his hair was awry, and his white cap lay in a pool of ink.

Lessing crossed the room at two strides, and gazed at the pale face and apparently lifeless body of Setonhurst.

"What does this mean, Lieutenant Mellish?" he demanded, sharply.

"The safe's been broken into," cried Lockwood, suddenly.

Mellish faced them, with a brave attempt to be calm. "I came in here a few moments ago," he said, quietly, "and I found Jack laid out as you see, his head cut open. The room was in the condition you see it now."

"How was the wound inflicted?" asked Lessing, sharply.

"I do not know, Captain Lessing," returned Mellish. "I have been here but a few minutes."

"Has the safe been rifled? Answer that," demanded Lessing. "This is a pretty bad mess—a pretty bad mess—for you."

"Why—why——" Dick faced him, his mouth gaping, his eyes staring. "You—you don't suspect me of—this—you—don't—suspect—me—of—oh, it's too absurd!"

"There's nothing absurd about the matter," Lessing said, grimly. "We find you here alone with an unconscious man, one killed, perhaps. The safe has been picked——" He had been examining it; and as he spoke, he stooped and possessed himself of something lying on the floor. It was a silver penknife, with a curved, picklike blade. "Here is the knife that picked the safe. If we can find the owner of this knife——"

"Let me see it." Whitmarsh spoke, for the first time. When Lessing had handed it to him, Whitmarsh shot a sudden glance at Mellish, and his lips compressed themselves.

Lessing watched him sharply. "Do you know the man who owns this knife?" he asked.

Whitmarsh did not answer for a moment. "I know a man who owned one like it. But this is no time for such matters. I'll run for one of the surgeons—Jameson, I guess."

"I'll go with you," said Mellish. "This has made me sick." He passed his hand over his forehead.

"You will remain here, Lieutenant Mellish," said Lessing, sternly. "Until this matter has been explained, you may consider yourself under arrest, sir."

Dick turned slowly and met his eyes. "Under arrest?" he said. "For what? For trying to kill a man who has always been my friend? For burglarizing a government safe and taking army funds? Do you mean to say, Captain Lessing, that you dare to even hint that I did such a thing?"

"Yes," replied Lessing, steadily. "I do dare. The circumstances are suspicious. We will wait for the arrival of the surgeon and the colonel. Whitmarsh, suppose you run and notify the colonel and Surgeon Jameson."

Whitmarsh saluted and went out. Dick drew closer to Lessing, an ugly look in his eyes.

"So you take this way of getting even, is that it?" he inquired. "By all that's holy, I'll——"

Lockwood caught his arm and pulled him away from Lessing. "Dick Mellish, things look bad enough as they are! You're making them worse. Captain Lessing is doing his duty just now, and I am doing mine. We have a right to suspect you when found in such——"

Mellish sat down, and with trembling fingers lighted a cigarette. "Lockwood, I want to ask you never to speak to me outside of official duties," he said, slowly. "I thought you were my friend. And you think that I—oh, it's too horrible!"

He sat still, gazing in front of him. Suddenly Lockwood stepped forward and picked up something.

"This is what did the trick," cried Lockwood, suddenly. "Jack was struck on the back of the head by this. It's a regulation officer's Colt's—and it's monogramed—good God! it's monogramed——"

Lockwood turned to Lessing. "What is the monogram?" he asked, shakily.

"R. T.—no, P. M.," said Lessing. "Isn't it?"

"No—R. Z. M.," cried Lockwood. "R. Z. M.—do you hear that, Lieutenant Mellish? R. Z. M. stands for Richard Zebulon Mellish, and that's your name—that's your name!"

Dick Mellish sprang to his feet, his hands gripping the table, and gazed at the revolver which Lockwood held in his hand. Then, with a great groan, he

collapsed into a chair and bowed his head.

CHAPTER V.

DISGRACE.

An hour later, the colonel and his daughter sat outside the bedroom of the injured youth and awaited the verdict of Surgeon Jameson, who, with the assistance of an assistant surgeon and two hospital stewards, had been working over the body of Jack Setonhurst. In another room, adjoining the one in which they were, Dick Mellish sat bolt upright in a straight-backed chair, his arms folded and his eyes staring into vacancy. He had not spoken since the revolver had been shown him.

Lockwood, Whitmarsh, Lessing and the three majors, Sanders, Merton and Noonan, lounged about, watching Mellish furtively, and pretending to read magazines. All save Mellish were smoking; and silence had reigned for the past half hour.

The door of the bedroom opened, and Dr. Jameson came out and into the presence of the colonel and April Setonhurst. The girl sprang up at his entrance, and darted across the room.

"What is it, doctor?" she asked, tensely. "What is it? Will he recover?"

"There was hardly a question of that from the first," returned Jameson, judicially. "The blow was not delivered with sufficient force to cause death. There is no doubt that he will recover. He is now in a comatose condition, and, from what I can gather from present conditions, his life is safe. But I had better tell you the worst now."

"Yes," breathed Colonel Setonhurst.

"There are two layers to the skull, as you know. The blow did not fracture the outer table of the skull; none of the bones are broken. But I have every reason to fear that the spongy bone of the inner table has been displaced, perhaps fractured, thereby causing a hemorrhage and scar to form. In everyday language, a clot on the brain."

"And that?" asked April, with an effort.

"That means, perhaps, temporary aberration. Trephining will perhaps be necessary. As to that, I cannot say. The patient's symptoms at the present time tell me nothing whatsoever. We must wait until he recovers consciousness. Then I will have a more favorable opportunity to diagnose his case." He dropped his professional tone and put a hand on the colonel's shoulder. "My dear colonel," he said, "don't take the matter too hardly. And, believe me, the boy will recover. But what I should like to know is by whom and how the blow was inflicted. It was not struck with intent to murder, else the person who dealt it would have struck with more force. A knowledge of the circumstances may be useful, you know."

The colonel remained silent. April looked up with tear-stained eyes. "I have asked him that over and over again, but he will not tell me. Oh, father, what does it all mean?"

"You will know soon enough, April," said the colonel, sternly. He turned to Dr. Jameson. "We are about to hold an unofficial inquiry to satisfy myself as to the advisability of putting the supposed criminal under arrest. April, I must again ask you to go to your room. Dr. Jameson, please come with me."

April threw her arms about her father's neck. "Oh, daddy, tell me, won't you? I can see by your looks that you dread what is coming."

Her father patted her cheek. "My dear, I can only say that I look on Jack's injuries as light compared with the mental anguish which will come as a result of this. Now go to your room, dearie. You will know all too soon." He kissed her, then threw open the door to the next room and motioned the surgeon within. The colonel followed him, and a moment later a key grated in the lock.

At the colonel's entrance, the officers rose to their feet and saluted. Even Mellish arose and saluted, mechanically.

"Sit down, please," said the colonel. They obeyed him. He alone remained standing.

"Gentlemen," he said, slowly, "this is not an official affair. Things have so happened that it is necessary to arrest immediately the man guilty of the outrage which the night has brought forth. From what I have been told, it appears that the guilt has been fastened on a young officer now present, who has enjoyed my esteem and my friendship for many years; whose father is my friend; who has been the playmate of my daughter and my son. It is hard for me to believe that this officer is guilty of what he is accused. I cannot order him under arrest until I am fully satisfied that he deserves it. Captain Lessing, I must ask you to tell me all you know about this matter."

Lessing arose. "Colonel, I beg to be excused from the burden of the testimony. It so happens that Lieutenant Mellish and myself are not good friends. We have had several quarrels, and he has threatened to bring to your attention certain incidents in my past life not altogether creditable to me. If I seem to take the initiative, it will appear uncommonly like revenge. So I beg that you will leave my testimony out of the matter, and consider only that of Lieutenants Whitmarsh and Lockwood, who witnessed the same scene that I did."

The colonel twirled his ring about his finger and looked at Lessing from beneath his heavy eyebrows. "Your sentiments do you credit, Captain Lessing," he said; "but this is a matter in the interests of the service. All personal affairs between you and Lieutenant Mellish are out of the question. Give me your evidence, or, rather, your reasons for believing Lieutenant Mellish to be guilty of—this affair," he finished, brokenly.

Lessing met the colonel's gaze, and looked thoughtfully about the room. "Very well, sir," he said, obediently. "I will tell you what I saw and what I surmised. If it savors of prejudice, I can only say that I have told you of the dislike between Lieutenant Mellish and myself. The reason which took me to Paymaster Setonhurst's office was that he and I were to have gone for a row at half after nine. I was strolling in the direction of his office, when I ran across Lieutenants Whitmarsh and Lockwood, who accompanied me, stating that they would go for a row also. We reached the paymaster's office, and found the door of the building open. Paymaster Setonhurst was expecting me, so I did not think it worth while to knock. We passed into the outer room, and went down the corridor, and opened the door of the inner office. There we found Lieutenant Mellish bending over the body of Paymaster Setonhurst. The paymaster's head was on the table, and blood was streaming from a wound in his head. The safe door was open, and the floor was strewn with papers and official documents, a few coins and some bank notes.

"Naturally, finding Lieutenant Mellish there, I asked him how the thing had happened. He said that he did not know; that he had entered the office a few minutes before and had found Paymaster Setonhurst in that condition. My dislike for Lieutenant Mellish may have made me prejudiced, but, at any rate, I immediately conceived the idea that he was the guilty person. To strengthen my theory came the discovery of the picked safe lock and a small silver knife lying on the floor. I was holding this in my hand when Lieutenant Whitmarsh identified it as one very much like the one which Lieutenant Mellish carried."

"I will not swear to it," broke in Whitmarsh. "It resembles Lieutenant Mellish's pocketknife. That is all I can say."

"Proceed, Captain Lessing," commanded the colonel.

"There is very little to add, sir, except the fact that Lieutenant Mellish grew very ugly in his behavior when told that he could not leave the office. While he spoke, Lieutenant Lockwood picked up a revolver from the floor. It was a regulation officer's Colt, and had on its butt the monogram R. Z. M. The butt was stained with blood, and the revolver was evidently the instrument used for striking Paymaster Setonhurst. The initials R. Z. M. stand

for Richard Zebulon Mellish, so Lieutenant Lockwood informs me. That is practically all, sir, except that I sent Lieutenant Whitmarsh for you and for the surgeon, and had Lieutenant Lockwood bring the paymaster's clerk, in order to have him find out just what amount of money had been abstracted from the safe. It is needless to say that we found no money on Lieutenant Mellish. If he is guilty of this crime, he must have had a confederate to take away the spoils."

There was a knock on the door, and a thin, undersized, oldish-young man entered. "Here is the paymaster's clerk, colonel. Mr. Hunley, have you finished his comparison of the accounts with the money remaining?"

"Yes, sir," said Hunley, hurriedly. "There is a deficit of"—he examined a bit of paper—"eighteen hundred and thirty dollars, so far as I can calculate it out, sir."

Dick Mellish started suddenly, and his eyes blinked. With a determined effort he held himself in check.

The colonel nodded to the pay clerk. "Thank you, Mr. Hunley, that is all. You may go, sir." The little pay clerk, glad to be out of the tense atmosphere, bowed to the assembled company, said "good-night" and passed out. There was silence in the room for some time. Presently the colonel cleared his throat and spoke.

"Is there anything more to be said before Mr. Mellish takes the stand and gives his version of the affair?" he asked, slowly.

"I believe Lieutenant Whitmarsh can say something which seems to give a reason for the committing of the crime," said Lessing. "There is always a motive. The motive lies in what Lieutenant Whitmarsh told me a few minutes after we came here."

Whitmarsh had grown very pale, and he avoided the gaze of Mellish. The colonel turned and looked in the direction of the signal corps lieutenant. "Well, Lieutenant Whitmarsh, what have you to say?"

"Colonel, believe me," stuttered Whitmarsh, "no one regrets this more than myself. Lieutenant Mellish has always been a friend of mine——"

"You will remember, sir, that this matter leaves all questions of friendship outside. You are being asked to give testimony which will or will not throw light on the case, and give me a better idea of what to do."

"Well, sir," said Whitmarsh, desperately, "I'm sorry I mentioned the matter now, for it may have nothing to do with the case. Circumstantial evidence is sometimes misleading——"

"Lieutenant Whitmarsh," said the colonel, sternly, "I must ask you to refrain from comments on the aspect of legal cases. What is this evidence?"

"Well, sir" — Whitmarsh hesitated, then took a deep breath—"the day before yesterday, Lieutenant Mellish telegraphed to his father asking for two thousand dollars to be wired him immediately. The answer came this morning, and stated that Senator Mellish was entangled in stock investments and could not send the money. I happened to see these telegrams because I have charge of that branch, as you know."

"That is all, Lieutenant Whitmarsh," said Colonel Setonhurst. "That is all." His tone was very grave.

A dull, cold silence settled on the room again, and the colonel looked across at Mellish, a look on his face not pleasant to see.

"Lieutenant Mellish," he said, "you have heard the evidence which has been brought against you. The evidence is damaging, indeed. But until I have heard your own statement, I will refrain from expressing an opinion. I cannot but think that you can explain your connection with this matter in a way which will clear you of the charge brought against you."

Dick Mellish arose, his hands clasped behind his back and his fingers twitching nervously. "I don't know that what I am going to say will clear me. The case looks pretty bad, sir, that I'll admit. I can't blame anyone for not taking my word that I didn't do it. I'm willing to swear by everything I hold sacred that I had nothing to do with it, but no one could be blamed for not

receiving my bare word in a matter of this kind. All I can say, sir, is that when I returned from duty yesterday I found a note from Paymaster Setonhurst, asking me to come to his office at nine-fifteen to-night. About that time I went to his office. I knocked two or three times and got no answer. Then I went into the room and found things in just the state that Captain Lessing described them. A moment or so after, maybe five minutes, Captain Lessing, Lieutenant Whitmarsh and Lieutenant Lockwood came in. All of them seemed to think I did it. In the light of the evidence brought out, I can hardly blame them. I am innocent, colonel, but I'm afraid I can't prove it, sir. I guess you'd better have me arrested, and say no more about it. It's bound to be cleared up in the end. Innocent people don't remain under the cloud forever. Perhaps I might say that Jack Setonhurst, your son, sir, was one of my best friends—but, then—that's all, sir. I haven't any more to say."

Colonel Setonhurst held out a silver penknife. "This is the knife used in picking the safe. Have you ever seen it before, Lieutenant Mellish?"

Dick crossed the room and took the knife in his hand; a hunted look came into his eyes. "Yes, sir," he said, slowly. "That is my pocketknife, Colonel Setonhurst, although I very seldom carry it. I generally leave it on my dressing table."

"You acknowledge that it is yours?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir," replied Mellish, dully.

A subdued whisper went up. The colonel held up his hand for silence. "This revolver, sir," he said, presenting it to Dick—"this revolver has your monogram. Is it your revolver?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dick. "It is my revolver—one of two I got in Manila. Oh, I can see, sir, that all this makes you believe me guilty. Why protract the examination? Everything looks black against me——"

"There is one question yet to be settled," broke in the colonel. "The amount of money stolen was eighteen hundred and thirty dollars; the rest was left. You wired your father for approximately that sum. What reason had you for wanting two thousand dollars?"

It was as though a black chasm had suddenly opened before Dick Mellish. To tell that would mean to incriminate the son of the very man who was questioning him; to make a thief out of Jack Setonhurst, the brother of the girl Dick loved. Yet, if he told this story, the awful stigma which was fast forming on his own character would be swept away. Once that story was told, the rest was easy. A sudden light came to Dick Mellish. Perhaps Jack had planned this affair himself, in order to escape the penalty of his theft. In that case——

Things blurred about Dick, and he rubbed his hand across his temples. What did it all mean, anyhow? Jack could not have planned to throw deliberate suspicion on him. No, that couldn't be; but something was wrong.

"Come, come," said the colonel, sharply. "Why did you want that money?"

"That, sir, is something I can't tell you," replied Dick, as calmly as possible. "It isn't exactly my secret, sir. I wanted the money for some one else, and that's all I can say—that's all I can say!"

He threw out his arms with a sudden gesture of rage. "I don't understand how my revolver got there, how my knife got there. I don't understand that. It looks as if something's been planned." He turned on Lessing, suddenly and fiercely. "I'm not clever, like you, Lessing, but maybe I've got an animal intuition to make up for it. You've got something to do with this, and——"

"Lieutenant Mellish," thundered Colonel Setonhurst, "you will remember that you are on trial. Your words to Captain Lessing are absurd." He paused for a moment. "I have carefully considered all evidence submitted, Mr. Mellish. I find that I am warranted in holding you under arrest until a general court-martial can be con-

vened. You may consider yourself suspended from the service, sir, and will be placed under arrest. Captain Lessing, step to the telephone and call up the officer of the night. Have him send a corporal's guard for Lieutenant Mellish. He is to be confined in his quarters until further notice."

There was a sudden exclamation, and the curtains to the rear of the room parted. April, her cheeks flushed and her eyes bright, stepped into full view of the assembled company.

"Shame!" she cried. "Shame, father! Can you believe that Dick Mellish did this? You've known him ever since he was a little boy. Did you ever know him to do anything dishonorable? Hasn't he always been Jack's champion? Hasn't Jack always gone to him for advice and help when he was afraid to come to you? And you accuse Dick Mellish, dear, honest Dick Mellish"—there was a great sob in her voice—"of doing this! Father, how can you?"

She darted across the room and caught Dick's hand. "I don't believe it of you, Dick, dear; I don't believe it of you. I know you didn't do it. I trust you, Dick——"

Mellish's face lighted with a rare, tender smile. He bent over the girl and held her hand reverently. "So long as you don't believe it, April—your trust means so much, so much to me! April, April, I can't say what I should—but you know——"

"I believe in you, Dick," she said, and caught his hand in hers. Then she turned and faced the others defiantly.

"It's all a mistake. I don't care what evidence you have. It's all a mistake. And you've forgotten one thing. Jack is going to live; he is out of danger, and he is going to live. Before long he will be conscious, and he will be able to disprove what you've said about Dick."

"Pardon me, Miss April," said Dr. Jameson, quietly. "I thought I had explained to you. Perhaps I have not been fully explicit. Your brother is out of danger, so far as his life is concerned; but when he comes to consciousness, I am afraid he will be an——"

Setonhurst sprang to his feet, deathly pale.

"What is this?" he cried.

"I am afraid that he will never be able to explain this occurrence. Perhaps he may never speak intelligently again. His brain will be like a baby's. He will be——"

The colonel's iron nerve broke down. "My son—an imbecile? Oh, God! oh, God!"

Mellish felt a heavy weight in his arms. April Setonhurst had fainted.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INSURRECTION.

When Lieutenant Mellish returned to his quarters, in charge of a corporal's guard, his head was in a very confused muddle. He entered the house and went to his room without delay. Looking from the window, he saw that two of the guards patrolled the lawn beneath, and he could hear another outside, making preparation to spend the night there.

When Dick sat down to figure it all out, he was surprised in that he was not more badly hurt by the matter than he was. There was a curious exaltation which overcame the gloomier thoughts and left no room for them for the moment.

April had shown that she cared for him; cared for him more than he had imagined was possible. She had stood out bravely for his innocence; had championed him when all the others were against him; had been his one single friend, the one person who believed his word against the damning evidence that had been brought to bear.

He did not dare whisper to himself that she loved him. It was enough, for the time, that she cared as much as she had shown. Things must not come too suddenly. Besides, it would never do for her to care for him in that way while he was in this predicament.

He must get out of the muddle in some way; must clear his name from the stain that had been placed upon it. He sat down on the edge of his bed,

and lighted a cigarette, staring intently at the moon, but really seeing April's face somewhere out there in the silvery blue clouds.

"It looks bad," he muttered. "It looks awful bad. My revolver? How in the devil did it get there? My knife? Good Lord! how could that have happened? And there wasn't really any robbery, after all, because Jack was short that much money, anyhow. And now he's insensible, probably won't get his wits back for Lord knows how long. He can't tell how it all happened. Good Heaven, if it should be a plant! Jack's plant, to account for the loss of the money. But he couldn't hit himself on the back of the head like that. No; that won't work! Oh, how did it happen?"

He drew himself up erectly, his heels together, and his lips tightly clinched. "I've got to clear myself somehow. I've simply got to get rid of this—if it's only for April's sake. She believed in me. Dear April!"

He felt within the bosom of his shirt and pulled out a little silver heart on a chain of the same metal. He pressed a spring and disclosed the face of a girl of sixteen, April's face some years before.

"Dear April," he said, tenderly. "I'm going to get out of this somehow. And I'm not going to tell them why I wanted that money. I'm not going to get Jack into a hole. No, I'm not going to do it. I'll get out of this somehow—I don't know just how, sweetheart, but I'll get out of it without pulling him into it. No one will ever know he took that money. No, you'll never have that disgrace."

He raised the picture to his lips and kissed it; then snapped back the locket and replaced it.

He picked up a handful of cigarettes and put them on a little tabouret; then he pulled his reclining chair up to the window. "I guess there won't be much sleep for me to-night," he muttered. "I've got to think this thing out. I wish I were clever; oh, how I do wish it! I can't figure out things, somehow."

He reclined at full length, his cigarette streaking the moonlight with faint blue spirals. His brows were contracted and his teeth clinched, and he lighted cigarette after cigarette, vainly cudgeling his brains for a way out of the difficulty. And in the end, tired nature asserted itself, the cigarette dropped from his fingers, and he went into the land of dreams.

The night was one of absolute silence, made more striking by the faint murmurings of the waves on the beach and the sounds of the insects and lizards, monotonous buzzes and croaks. The moon was behind a cloud, and for the moment the Southern Cross was obscured.

Then, out of the silence, came the sharp crack of a revolver, and the pop, pop, of several more. The two guards beneath Dick's window sprang to their feet, their carbines in hand.

"What the devil's that?" asked one.

As though in reply the earth shook beneath them, and out of the west came the deafening roar of an explosion, and the bright, lurid flash of houses shivered into bits and raised in a maelstrom of red. Bodies seemed entangled in the crash, also.

A bit of hot stone struck one of the guards, and then the air was full of red-hot bits of iron, cloth, wood.

The two guards, wiping the dust from their eyes, stared open-mouthed. Before them they saw what had once been barracks reduced to nothingness.

"Good God!" cried the first guard. "The barracks have been blown up. Good God! How many dead——"

Again the pop of a rifle came to their ears, a feebly insignificant sound after the great explosion. Dick Mellish, awakened and hurled from his chair by the shock, looked from his window.

"What is the matter?" he asked, unsteadily. "I felt a crash——"

"The barracks have been blown up, sir," answered the first guard, weakly.

Dick's mind was clear enough when danger had to be faced. He did not pause to think of how the thing had happened. The solution was an easy one. Fabriano Kincheso had returned

to his people; the army had rumors of a threatened uprising in the Visayas. So Ilomanguete was to be the first attacked?

Dick had buckled on his sword and possessed himself of his remaining revolver. Then, unhesitatingly, he dropped from his window to the ground beside the two guards.

By this time the fort had been aroused; bugles were blowing, men were skurrying to and fro, revolvers and rifles were crackling. The officers in the quarters had hurried out, a miscellaneous lot, mostly in slippered feet, some still in pajamas.

"What's the row?"

"Barracks blown up—how do I know the damage? Good Lord! We'll have to see——"

Dick Mellish's voice rang out above the rest. "You'll have to take my parole," he said. "I'm going to find the damage. Anyone want to follow me?"

He crossed the quadrangle, stumbling over bits of stone and burning board, and ran down to where the barracks had been.

He almost fell into the blackened space where a great hole had been torn in the ground, and the charred and blackened embers of the barracks, and the smell of burning flesh, gave ghastly evidence of what had happened.

Dick stood transfixed and mute. The sight sickened him. Here close upon nine hundred men had slept. Now there remained how many of them? The barracks had been utterly destroyed.

"Oh, my God!" groaned Dick. "What—what—what fiend's work is this? Damn you—damn you!" he swore, shaking his revolver into the black void before him. "Oh, damn you, who could have done this? My poor men, my poor men!"

The great muscles of his body shook, and tears wetted his cheek. He brushed them away with an unsteady hand, and spoke on in a voice which wavered and shook:

"You curs! You yelping curs! Come out of that—come out of that—you assassins! Oh, God! it's too horrible, it's too horrible!"

He turned his back and stumbled back to where he had left the others. But as he turned there was a quick shot and a curse, and Dick ran around the corner of the quadrangle to find three half-naked Filipinos kneeling over something on the ground. Without a thought for what they were doing, the mad death lust sought Mellish. He fired quickly, and one of them, with unearthly yells, pitched forward and to the sand. It seemed like a signal, for a moment later white-clad forms and brown bodies began to appear at the walls and scramble over, dropping on the sand and running toward the combatants. Dick could see the form of a white man lying on the ground. He rushed forward, grasping at him and swinging him into his arms with a single play of his huge muscles.

"Let me alone. I'm done for," came the voice of Lessing.

"Done for, hell!" cried Dick, savagely. "Lie still!" His booted foot caught the first approaching Filipino and swung him back into the ranks with a broken jaw. Then came the quick pop of carbines again, and Dick turned and fled with his burden.

Suddenly Lessing cried out in pain. "I've got it again. Drop me, man! It's all up with me. Drop me!"

"Stay still," answered Dick. Summoning all his strength, he leaped over a fallen timber and disappeared around the corner of the ordnance barracks. Without a tremor he fished the key from his pockets, unlocked the ordnance storehouse door and went within with his burden. He laid Lessing on the floor.

"I'm going for the others," he said. "I'll have a surgeon for you without delay."

He rushed out of the storehouse, locking it behind him, and to the officers' quarters, where he thrust the key in the hands of Major Noonan. "The whole barracks blown up," he said, breathlessly. "I've just pulled Lessing out of a scrape. He's in the ordnance storehouse. We've got to hold it. We

can't let them have the arms. Take charge, major, if you please, and rush the storehouse, while I bring others of the wounded ones there."

Dick did not pause to further explain, but dashed off in the direction of the colonel's house. He met the colonel, bareheaded and half robed, and gasped out the tidings to him. "Look after Miss April, sir," he cried. "I'll carry Jack over to the storehouse. Quick, you must get there. They're closing in on us every minute. Hurry, colonel, hurry!"

He swung into the house and into the sick room. The hospital steward in attendance was briefly acquainted with the facts. "I'll carry Lieutenant Setonhurst," said Dick Mellish. "You save your own neck, and be quick about it!"

Mellish picked up the unconscious form of Jack Setonhurst as lightly as though he were a baby. His giant strength, under the nervous tension of the moment, felt the weight of the young paymaster not at all. He crossed the house again, and met the colonel, April clinging to his arm.

"Come now, please," called Dick. "Come, follow me." With his disengaged arm he caught April, but the colonel pulled her back.

"I will attend to my daughter, sir," he said. "We will follow you."

Hurriedly Dick made his way down the lane and across the grounds. There were several shots from out of the darkness, but the party gained the storehouse in safety and were welcomed by Whitmarsh, who stood at the ordnance door, a revolver in hand. The storehouse was crowded with officers in disordered attire, holding revolvers and swords in their hands, and keeping guard at the windows for any brown forms that might appear.

But, the climax past, the anticlimax was still to come. For as Major Sanders and his wife were discerned rushing toward the storehouse, there was a fusillade of shots, and the two went down. As though a signal was thus given, the space before the storehouse was filled with forms in white, khaki and the altogether; and with a concerted action the Filipinos rushed for the ordnance door. The door was quickly slammed by Whitmarsh and the bolt shot. Then, from the windows, the officers poured the contents of their revolvers into the brown mass below. They fell back with yelps and cries, and vanished in the shadows again.

When the electric current was switched on, the haggard group of defenders were discovered. Seven line officers were missing, and Major Sanders' wife they had seen go down. Four hospital stewards had been saved and several other petty officers. The staff officers had all escaped, and there were, as yet, no wounded save only Lessing, whom Jameson was now examining in the light of the electric arcs.

The suddenness of the catastrophe prevented any words. But discipline was slowly reasserting itself, and, under the commands of the colonel, certain officers were detailed for guard work at the windows, others for reserve, and the main body stationed at the door.

"They'll try to rush the door, I have no doubt," said the colonel. "We must be prepared for them there."

Jameson turned to the colonel and whispered a few words. "I doubt if Lessing will live," he said. "There are serious internal injuries. With your permission, I'll detail myself to look after him and your son until I am needed."

The colonel assented brusquely. A moment later a cry of horror came from the windows as the figure of the wife of one of the sergeants appeared in the light below. She held a baby in her arms.

"God!" muttered Lockwood. He had hardly spoken when a dusky body obstructed his view. He fired quickly, but not before a bolo gleamed in the moonlight, and the woman, with a shriek, went down. As Lockwood raised his revolver to fire again, the Filipino picked up the baby and held it before him as a defense. Unmolested he gained the shadow of one of the buildings.

Colonel Setonhurst was aroused out of his ponderings by the voice of Dick

Mellish. "Colonel," he said, saluting. The colonel turned a dull eye upon him.

"We can't hold out against these people. We have no food and no water. We must telegraph to Iloilo for aid."

"The wires have been cut," broke in Whitmarsh, gloomily. "I tried that. They've cut the wires."

"Word has got to get to Iloilo in some way, if we don't want a massacre here," said Dick, sternly. "I ask it as a favor, colonel, that I be allowed to make an attempt to get the customs' motor launch and get to Iloilo. I can do it inside six hours, and have reinforcements here by to-morrow. My honor was assailed to-night. Give me the chance to vindicate myself."

The colonel turned heavily upon him. "They say that death wipes out all memory of crimes committed," he said, slowly. "You want to die—is that it?"

"No," answered Mellish, "I do not want to die. I'll get that cutter and I'll make Iloilo. I won't die until I get there, anyhow. Give me the privilege, sir."

"It is madness, Lieutenant Mellish," said the colonel; "the moment you pass out of this shelter you will be shot down."

"Give me, then, the right to try," pleaded Dick.

The colonel sat down, his head on his hand. Suddenly a soft hand clasped Dick's.

"You mustn't go—you mustn't go, Dickie," breathed April Setonhurst. "You mustn't go and leave me—you mustn't."

"Some one has *got* to go, April," said Dick, holding her hand for a moment. "Some one has got to go. If anything happens to me, some one else will have to try it. It's better that a few men be sacrificed in the attempt than to have everyone sacrificed here. We simply can't hold out—there's no chance of it."

Then April spoke very low. "But why should you be the one, Dickie?" she half sobbed. "I can't spare you, Dickie, I——"

The colonel looked up, weary-eyed. "You are right, Mr. Mellish," he said, slowly. "You are right. I haven't seen things very clearly. Some one must get to Iloilo, and give the general the information. I understand that you wish to volunteer——"

"No, no, father," cried April, her hands catching his shoulder. "Why should Dick go?"

Mellish looked at her with suspicious moisture in his eyes. "I'm the biggest man here, April," he said, simply. "The strongest man, physically. I've got more chance than any of the others. Sometimes strength is useful. It is now. Besides, I am under suspicion—but let that pass. Colonel, I repeat my request. I shall attempt to get through the enemy's lines, and make the customs' jetty. There I can take possession of the customs' motor launch. I know how to run the thing. Have I your leave?"

"You have, sir." The colonel arose. "You will proceed to Iloilo and present my compliments to General Wade; inform him of the fact that the barracks have been dynamited and a majority, perhaps, of the regiment annihilated; and ask for immediate assistance to prevent further loss at the hands of the *insurrectos*."

Dick saluted. "Yes, sir," he said. Then he held out his hand. "Good-by, colonel. I trust that some day we'll find out who was guilty of the act of which I am accused." He suddenly withdrew his hand, for he saw that the colonel was ignoring it. Then he turned to April.

"There's a chance I mayn't see you again, dearie," he said, a trifle huskily. "You know I can't say what I want to say except that—if you loved me enough—I wanted you to marry me. For I love you, April, love you very much—so much I can't tell you. Good-by."

He released her hands and turned away. Then he felt a sudden thrill as a pair of soft arms were flung about his neck, and a very little voice sobbed: "You're breaking my heart, Dickie. Don't you think—I care as much—as you?"

CHAPTER VII.

TOYING WITH DEATH.

If Dick had paused to consider, perhaps he might have weakened. Instead, he only held April in his arms for a moment; as she sobbed, he released her gently, and turned out of the way and up the stairs to the windows. Here he paused for a moment to borrow a cartridge belt from another officer, and to hand the keys of the ordnance stores to Major Noonan.

He strapped the cartridge belt about his waist and filled his revolver. From Whitmarsh he borrowed a second revolver, which he thrust into the holster strapped to his belt. Then, holding his own weapon in his hand, he crept to the window and quietly dropped to the ground.

His action was instantly perceived, as was indicated by the immediate fusillade which greeted his appearance. Dick bent his head low and ran for the shelter of the adjoining building. A bullet zigzagged close to his cheek and left a stain of red.

As he turned the corner sharply, some one stuck a revolver point-blank into his face. His left arm knocked it up and his free hand caught his threatener on the point of the jaw. The man collapsed with a yell, and Dick ran on. Five men opposed his progress. He lowered his head and burst in among them like a wild bull. They were carried away by the impetus of the attack, and fell over one another. Dick was now halfway across the fort inclosure.

He ran easily but swiftly, his revolver held lightly in his hand. A white-clad figure leaped from behind a wall, and Dick shot him without raising his revolver to sight. Immediately after the shot Dick dropped flat on the sands, and a moment later congratulated himself on his acumen. For the low wall held others than the one Dick had accounted for, and these blazed away immediately. As soon as they had fired, Dick sprang to his feet, cleared the wall at a bound and was among some twenty or thirty of them. He shot quickly, and his clinched fist knocked others sprawling. Like a bolt of lightning he fled away before they had recovered from the surprise of the attack, and a moment later had clambered over the outer wall of the fort and dropped on the sand of the beach.

Here was easy running, and the custom house loomed up very near now. He ran speedily, and loaded his used revolver as he ran. Behind him he heard the ping, ping of the carbines and revolvers, and bullets buzzed by him like noisy and vicious mosquitoes, one carrying away his cap, but most of them simply tearing up sand before him.

"Lucky for me they're poor marksmen," he breathed.

A moment later fire spurted out from a clump of chaparral, and something burned him in the leg. With a cry of pain he pitched forward heavily in the sand, and before he had recovered himself four Filipinos had sprung from the bushes and thrown themselves upon him. With a cry of rage he dropped his revolver, and the pain in his leg was immediately forgotten. A great, wild, unreasoning rage seized him as he felt the touch of these assailants. These were the men who had foully and cruelly murdered his men.

He gave a queer yell that meant nothing but the beast awakened in the man. His great muscles worked, and he seized handfuls of brown flesh as though to tear it away. One of his arms was now free. He saw a low-browed head leering at him, and his fist caught the man between the eyes and felled him. A swing of his muscles released the other arm, and his great hands encircled two brown necks. With a vicious cry of rage, he brought the two heads together with stunning force, and the skulls smashed like rotten gourds.

Almost immediately the fourth man drew back and leveled a revolver. Dick's long arm caught the hand that held the weapon and jerked it violently away, turning the wrist as he did so. The bones of the arm snapped, and the man dropped to the sand writhing and howling.

Still the ping, ping of the bullets in the rear came to his ears, and the shots whizzed perilously near him. He picked up his revolver and ran again. Every step was fraught with a pain like branding with hot irons. He set his teeth together and his lip, bitten through, dripped blood. Slowly he dragged himself to the customs wharf, and encountered again a solitary guard. Dick shot him quickly, and dropped into the motor boat.

Luckily the generator had been freshly supplied, and the little craft was ready for instant travel. Dick pulled the lever and took the wheel. The little boat churned the water about her, and then, like an arrow, darted out of the little cove and to the open channel.

The pain in his leg was one to cause him the acutest misery. He knew that there could be no aid for it, however, until he reached Iloilo. "That's time enough," he muttered. "I'll get there inside of six hours. I'll have to wait. What's a little thing like that? Ah!"

A sudden twinge reminded him that the thing in question was not so little as he would have liked to consider it.

He was passing out of the river channel now and into the straits. As he squinted through the glass, some premonition of a new danger came to him, for the sky had become overcast and the wind was gradually rising to a crescendo of wailing.

"Storm," he muttered. "Good heavens! everything seems to be against me to-night."

He moved his leg as he spoke, and the pain caused him to cry aloud. He reached up and twitched on the electric arc, and, looking down, saw that his white trousers were dyed red below the knee. He pulled the steering wheel about and jammed it in a position straight ahead; then, holding it firmly with one hand, he reached down and pulled up his trousers leg. He noted a little pool of blood on the floor.

With trembling fingers he jerked the trousers leg apart and sent another thrill of pain through his leg. He looked about him and caught sight of a bit of rope, with which he lashed the wheel tightly. From his pocket he took his handkerchief, and, after tearing away his undergarment, he found the blackened place where the bullet had penetrated his leg. The blood was oozing forth at a rate which alarmed him.

He tore the handkerchief into two strips and knotted them together. He placed one end of the strip on the wounded spot, and then began to bind it tightly as though he were winding woolen puttees about his legs. The binding of the wound was so painful that tears came into his eyes, but he knew that it must be done if he did not wish to bleed to death. So he lashed the leg tightly, so tightly that the pain became twice as intense as before.

He paused then and held himself in check, for his impulse was to throw himself down on the floor of the little cabin and writhe and groan in pain. "Come, come!" he said from between his clinched teeth. "This won't do. Brace up!" His fingers caught the lashings and he untied them. Just as he did so the boat seemed to leap in air, propelled by some great force beneath. A vivid zigzag of flame tore athwart the sky, and the boom of the artillery of the heavens reverberated in his ears like a death knell.

The wheel had slipped from his hands, but he was quick to seize it and jam it down hard. The little boat, carried on the swell of the sea, now fell into the trough, and water surged into the cabin, covering him with spray. Then again the waves struck the little boat and sent it high in air. It was all he could do to hang on to the wheel, bracing his sound leg against a beam, his foot holding an iron stanchion.

Again and again the little boat shot upward and downward. Mellish spat out mouthful after mouthful of salt water, and held on grimly. Now the boat began to rock, for the seas were catching it on the larboard side and swinging it back and forth like a cradle. At the first impact his injured limb slipped against a bulwark, and so great was the pain of the blow that tears

came to his eyes, and his teeth bit into his lips.

Then something tore apart with a hollow boom, and Dick could see that the little mast in the forward part of the boat had been swept down and overboard.

"Is it going to end like this?" he asked himself, vaguely. "Somehow, it doesn't seem right that the elements should be fighting against the right instead of for it." He vaguely remembered having read something like that before; but if his remembrance served him rightly, the elements had been on the side of the right that time. "It can't be that God in His mercy is going to let me go down," Dick murmured. "No, He couldn't let that be, for there's a lot depending on me getting to Iloilo."

Another wave struck the side of the boat, and the green water poured in cascades over the side. The boat heeled under the weight of the water, disgorged it and then came upright again.

"April, too," he said, tenderly. "April's back there. April's back there." He remembered that April was depending on his getting through. "April mustn't fall into their hands," he cried, in shrill despair. "She mustn't! And I'm powerless. A man can't fight the sea and the waves. I'm powerless."

As the thought of his impotency came to him, his wound began to ache again, and it was as though a burning iron was being passed through and through his limb. His pain, mental and physical, began to break him down. Tears stood out in his eyes. His voice was choked with sobs.

"April must not fall into their hands!" he cried. "She mustn't, I say!"

Still the little boat rocked forward and to the side. Still his wound pained him, and still he held to the wheel and steered for Iloilo.

And presently the storm began to break. But it was not until the early dawn of the morning came, roseate-hued, the sign of hope. And Dick Mellish blessed it and forgot his pain.

So, in good time, he came to Iloilo.

The motor boat had been left at the custom-house dock, and in the light of early morning, a man, pale-lipped, fierce-eyed and haggard, pulled himself painfully to the Calle Real, where he hailed the early risen driver of a *quelis*.

"*La Casa del General Wade—el general Americano,*" he added, weakly. "Quickly, now—*aprisa—pronto*——"

The driver noted the blood-stained limb and the fierce eyes. He sprang speedily to his seat, and planted his bare feet on the board. The man crept into the vehicle on hands and knees.

The lash fell across the horse's back and the vehicle dashed up the Calle Real, turned into the Plaza and from thence up the Calle General Hughes. Ten minutes later the man who had ridden was holding on to the iron rails surrounding the general's house. The *cochero*—driver—ran to him and gave him his puny support. Together they passed into the well-kept gardens, and through the carriageway to the *patio*.

A sentry intercepted them. "What do you want?" he asked, gazing suspiciously at the wounded man, who, in collarless shirt, torn and bloody trousers and stained canvas shoes, a revolver strapped to his waist, weakly demanded to be taken to the general.

"What do you want with the general?" demanded the guard, suspiciously. "He's not awake yet. I can't have you disturbing him."

Immediately the fierce eyes blazed at him. "Stand away there, my man," cried Dick Mellish. "I am Lieutenant Mellish, from Ilomanguete, and I must see General Wade at once. Take me to him now without any further delay." A spasm of pain crossed his face. "Quick, man!"

Something in Dick's tone awed the man. He relinquished his carbine and supported Dick. "I'll take him," he said to the *cochero*. "*Vamos!*"

"*El dinero*—no have got," wailed the *cochero*.

Dick smiled faintly and tossed him a peso. "Take me to the general, quick," he gasped to the guard. "I'm pretty badly hit, and I'm afraid I'll go off my head in a minute. Hurry!"

The guard recognized the voice of official command. "Yes, lieutenant," he said, respectfully. "Yes, sir. I hope you're not in any great pain, sir."

Supporting the heavy frame of the wounded giant, the guard drew him up the steps to the inner balcony, where he crossed a corridor and knocked on a high-linteled door.

"Eh—what's that?" came an irritable voice.

"Open the door, general," gasped Dick, faintly. "It's Mellish—from Ilomanguete—must see you—important and——"

There was a subdued grunt and an irritable exclamation, and presently the door opened and revealed the form of the general, a kimono thrown over his pajamas and his feet in slippers. At the sight of Mellish he took a step backward.

"Lieutenant Mellish!" he said. "Why, what——"

Dick saluted weakly. "Yes, general," he said. "Send this man for one of the surgeons. I'll need him in a minute. I must talk to you at once."

The general held open the door, and the guard deposited Mellish on a divan. "Go for Major Mortimer at once," said the general. "Dr. Mortimer, of course," he added. The guard saluted and went out, surprise written large on his face.

"Now, Mellish," said the general.

"Yes, general," he said, drowsily. Then he opened his eyes. "Insurrection," he gasped, his eyes staring. "Insurrection. They dynamited the barracks. Scores of men wiped out. Not all the officers remain—not even all of the women. I came down in a motor boat—storm—you must send reinforcements quickly—they can't hold out very much longer—all that was last night."

He drew himself up and smiled in a friendly way at the general. "I came in a motor boat, you know. It's rather good fun." Then he paused and his eyes looked untold horrors. "April Setonhurst—April, April—they won't get you—no, by Heaven, they won't get you—I'll get to Iloilo—I say, I *will* get to Iloilo——"

He looked about him speculatively, then his eyes caught the incredulous gaze of the general. He smiled politely, and, with his last remaining strength, he drew himself up stiffly and saluted.

"Colonel Setonhurst presents his compliments to the Emperor of China and says will he please send some Shanghais to——"

He collapsed as he spoke, and had not the general, with a cry of pity, darted across and caught him, he would have gone down a limp heap.

"Lord! what a healthy young animal he must be," said the major-doctor a few minutes after. "He's lost enough blood to serve one ordinary man, and the bone in his leg was smashed like a pipestem. And he managed to come down from Ilomanguete and weather that storm last night!"

"It's almost incredible," murmured the general. The order for the muster had already gone out, and the Fifty-ninth Infantry, two squadrons of the Eighty-seventh Cavalry, and a battalion of artillery were busily making ready for the "hike." "If those people in Ilomanguete are saved it will be his doing." Then the general's face became suffused with rage. "We'll wipe Kincheso from the face of the earth this time, Mortimer," he said, thickly. "The civil government and its pacific measures be damned! We'll kill every *tao* within thirty miles of Ilomanguete, and burn every *pueblo* and *barrio* in that vicinity!"

The general paused and wiped something from his eye. "One of the best regiments in the service—half wiped out," he said, slowly. Then he sprang to his feet. "There is a saying that four Filipinos equal one white man. We'll carry that out, Mortimer. There will be four dead Filipinos for every massacred member of the Seventy-first!"

CHAPTER VIII.

LESSING THROWS SOME LIGHT.

Six attempts had been made during the night to carry the stronghold of the Americans; six attempts that failed, but

only at the cost of something like a third of the defenders. The men were haggard and wearied, fighting not because they expected to keep the enemy off in the long run, but because death at the hands of Filipinos was far better than surrender to them.

The fighting had been done by sorties, to prevent the firing of the place. Burning torches had been carried to the very door of the storehouse, and sallies had been made to put out the fires. The Filipinos, waiting in reserve, had taken quick advantage of the appearance of the defenders, but had not managed to carry victory with them.

But it was plain to all that the defense could not keep up much longer. With the dawn had come a period of calm, and when the sun had risen, showing the ghastly shambles of the night before, there was not a brown man in sight. But the defenders knew that they lurked about within the various buildings and in the thick jungles which lay to the west.

It had not occurred to any of them that Dick Mellish had managed to make his way through the opposing hordes. Even if he had done so, the fearful storm of the night seemed to indicate that no small boat could have possibly weathered it. Only April Setonhurst steadfastly refused to believe that Dick had failed.

"He must have succeeded," she wept. "He must have! He said he would; and he always keeps his word. He must have succeeded!"

The surgeons had been through a more harassing night than the defenders. They had many wounded on their hands, and lacked the necessary implements and drugs to bring the relief which was needed. The wounded men had been carried into the loft and made as comfortable as was possible. It was from this loft that Dr. Jameson descended, soon after dawn, and sought Colonel Setonhurst.

"Captain Lessing can't live much longer," he said, quietly. "He wants to speak to you and to Miss April. I don't exactly know where he has been wounded, but he is bleeding internally, and it is impossible to save his life. He may flicker out at any minute, sir. Will you see him?"

The colonel nodded wearily, and touched April on the arm. "Come, dearie," he said. "Captain Lessing wants to see you. The doctor says his wounds are very serious."

April lifted her head and her eyes showed full of tears. "Yes, father," she said. She went up the little stairway and to the loft where a dozen men or more lay stretched out, bandaged and in various conditions of pain.

The doctor knelt beside one of the men and spoke. "Captain Lessing," he said, "the colonel and Miss Setonhurst are here."

Lessing opened his eyes and stared stonily at his visitors. "No, Miss Setonhurst," he gasped; "don't sympathize with me, I deserve what I've gotten. Just listen. I want to clear something up. I can't hold out much longer."

"You mustn't say that," choked April.

He waved his hand weakly. "Mellish picked me up and brought me here," he went on. "He tried to save my life, but there wasn't any life to save. I told him to drop me. I knew it was all up with me. I hear he went to fetch help from Iloilo, poor devil! He was a brave man—a brave man. I've wronged him. I've wronged you, too, colonel, and Jack Setonhurst, too. And I've wronged you, Miss April, by having been in your company."

He coughed and choked spasmodically. Then he raised himself on one hand and spoke rapidly, but very weakly.

"Listen. I haven't got much time left. Dick Mellish didn't assault your son. He was innocent, quite innocent. I stole his revolver and his knife, and I sent that note to him to come to the office. I struck your son, I picked the safe and then arranged to come in immediately afterward. No, I didn't take the money. There was no money to take. Oh, I know you're horrified and shocked; but I haven't much time left.

I can't be interrupted. Mellish knew about me. He knew about my past life, and meant to expose me. I wanted to get him out of the way. You see, I loved you, Miss April. A disgrace to have a man like myself love you—yes, it was. But I wanted him out of the way."

A fleck of red came to his lips. The doctor checked him sternly.

"You can't live five minutes if you talk," he said.

Lessing nodded feverishly. "I know—I know. Listen, colonel. Your son was the man who took that money. He lost it at cards or something. He came to Mellish and asked Mellish to get money to replace that he had taken. Mellish cabled his father. His father couldn't send it. Then your son appealed to me for aid. I thought it an excellent way to clear him and to incriminate Mellish. I did not mean to strike as hard as I did."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Colonel Setonhurst. "Good heavens! you dare tell me this!"

"I am a dying man, colonel. I dare. It is my right. Mellish is the kind of man I thought didn't exist. He did not try to clear himself. He did not set his own disgrace as above that of your son. He refused to tell the reason for his wanting money. That was his weak link. I told you about—the others. I stole his revolver, his knife, his——"

He fell back exhausted. "I—I did—love—you, April. I——"

His hands dropped to his sides. The doctor bent over him for a moment, then drew out his handkerchief and draped it so as to cover the dead man's face.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESCUE.

Below came the sudden shout of assured victory. From half a dozen shelters poured brown men, carbines and pistols in hands, intent on but one object—the taking of the stronghold.

They circled around the building, carrying long ladders, which they planted against the windows. The men above hurled themselves against the ladders and fired into the mob below. But although many of the attacking party fell, the ladders were held in place, and slowly but surely one Filipino after another crawled up the ladders and to the windows. The first men fell, but those behind pushed their bodies out of the way and hurled themselves into the windows and among the defenders. The storehouse became full of the smoke of the snapping revolvers, and American and Filipino grappled together, and fought with clubbed revolvers and carbines. The Filipinos stood between the white men and the windows, and, those spaces now cleared, they poured into them one after another, until the Americans were driven back to the middle rooms.

From the middle rooms they retreated slowly to the loft, leaving many of their companions behind them. There was but one chance now—to hold the loft. The stairs were narrow, and three men could hold them against all comers, if there were but enough men to take the places of the three.

Whitmarsh, Noonan and Sanders, sabers in hand, confronted the swelling mob which poured upward, and their swords flashed in and out, veritable blades of fire in the light of the sun. For fully five minutes they were unconquered; then one of the brown men, learning subtlety, hurled himself forward and seized Noonan's feet. The Irishman toppled and fell among the Filipinos, and was lost sight of. Another officer stepped forward quickly to take his place—it was Colonel Setonhurst. Almost immediately he was dragged back by two protesting lieutenants.

"We cannot spare our colonel," said Lockwood, softly, as he took the colonel's place, and a minute later fell with a black hole in his forehead.

Revolvers cracked and carbines spouted fire. Swords and bolos met. A blue haze of smoke surrounded Americans and Filipinos, and the stairs were strewn with the dead bodies of the defenders and their enemy.

Whitmarsh was wounded and San-

ders also; and now they were dragged up, and the loft door was slammed and padlocked.

"We will sacrifice no more men," cried Colonel Setonhurst.

Quiet fell among the defenders, a quiet broken only by the groans of the wounded. Then, from the outside, came the smell of wood burning.

"They've fired the stairs!" cried some one.

Colonel Setonhurst stood with his back to the door. "I have made a blunder," he said, gravely, "and will expiate it." His hand clutched the padlock.

Then out of the distance came the notes of a bugle.

Colonel Setonhurst sprang to the window, and threw open the barred shutters. "See them!" he cried. "They're running!—they're running!"

A sullen boom came to his ear, and a shell whizzed into a clump of palm trees.

The road over the hill showed a man in khaki, mounted on a gray horse and having the yellow trappings of the United States cavalry. He placed a bugle to his lips, and the sweet, clear notes resounded through the deserted buildings.

A moment later he spurred his horse and swept forward. From over the hills came platoon after platoon of men, riding swiftly, sabers in their free hands, revolvers in their bridle hands. Little spurts of fire came from them anon.

The cavalrymen swept onward, firing intermittently. From outhouses and from behind walls little groups of armed Filipinos broke for the shelter of the jungle to the west.

Colonel Setonhurst threw open the door. "Come," he cried. "There is no danger now. The flames aren't high enough to hurt. We must extinguish them—the wounded——"

Half an hour later the fire was out, and a man in a blue shirt and riding breeches, with the bars of a captain pinned on one shoulder, was saluting Colonel Setonhurst.

"We're not through with the beggars yet, colonel," he said, breathlessly. "We've got instructions from the general to go the limit. There won't be any *insurrectos* in this district when we get through. Hard ride? Yes, sir. We got marching orders at five this morning, and it's only ten o'clock now. The infantry are coming now. Some of the light artillery made it with us. Yes, sir."

A girl's voice broke in. "Mr. Mellish," she gasped. "Mr. Mellish——"

"Ah, how do, Miss Setonhurst?" He felt for his hat, found it gone and blushed. "Dickie Mellish? He's all right. Laid up in hospital with a broken leg. Lucky for you he managed to get us, wasn't it? Bully nerve he has, by thunder! Storm last night simply fearful—broken leg, too. I say——"

He extended an arm to catch the girl. "Now, I say——" he protested.

"That's—that's—what I wanted to hear," she choked, and drew a deep breath. "I'm better, now."

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

For nearly a week Dick Mellish was kept in a darkened room, where he tossed about restlessly with the fever. His wound had so weakened his giant's strength that his system was too weak to resist the attacks of the *dengue,* and the two ailments added together made his case one which needed constant attention.

They kept him quiet with hypodermic injections and sleeping draughts, and then, as he grew better, they allowed light in the room and permitted him to talk. The nurse knew quite well what his first question would be; he had asked it so often in his delirium.

He smiled wanly on the trained nurse. "Ilomanguete—they got there in time?"

"You mustn't try to talk too much," warned the nurse. "Yes, you saved the garrison, Mr. Mellish. The troops got there just as the *insurrectos* were firing the building."

'Yes! Yes! And were they all saved?" he asked, feverishly.

"Not all," she returned. "But Miss Setonhurst was." She showed a trifle of amusement in a faint smile.

Dick breathed a great sigh of relief, and then buried his head in his hands. Then presently he looked up again.

"Tell me about the rest of it," he said. "What did the troops do?"

"They have been chasing the *insurrectos* through the rice paddies and forests," the nurse replied. "And so far Colonel Mason has reported about one thousand dead Filipinos. But the general has given orders that the troops are to continue on the 'hike' until every *insurrecto* in the district is wiped out, and the leader, Kincheso, is dead. The general has strictly ordered that he does not want Kincheso brought in alive. He is afraid that the civil government will release him after a few years' imprisonment."

"Yes, that's so," said Dick. "But about——"

"You mustn't talk any more to-day," said the nurse, tyrannically. "To-morrow, if you're good, you shall see some visitors. Now, don't ask me whom."

When the morrow came it brought with it Colonel Setonhurst. He took Dick's wasted hand between his own and patted it gently.

"Dick, my boy," he said, brokenly, "I can't find words to thank you——"

"Oh, that's all right, colonel," said Dick, great uneasiness in his tone. "I don't want to be thanked, you know. It wasn't anything. I would have been back with the reinforcements if it hadn't been for this cursed leg——"

"Always the modest boy, aren't you, Richard?" said the colonel, sadly. "I'm trying to think of something to say which will show you that I am undergoing almost as much pain as you for the way in which I misjudged you."

Dick stared at him.

"You see, Lessing is dead," explained the colonel. And he told Dick what Lessing had said. "I should have believed in you more, Dick. And while I was condemning you, you were sheltering my own honor—my son's honor. I, your colonel, come to you ashamed and ask your forgiveness. It was a quixotic thing you did, but a very noble one, dear boy."

Dick flushed to the tips of his ears. "I'm sorry—for Jack," he said, simply. "I hope you won't let it out; just let folks think that Lessing committed a robbery. Then some day money can be sent to the conscience fund." He spoke hurriedly, for the colonel seemed about to break in. "And Jack—how is he?"

"He is in a room in this very hospital," said the colonel. "They have discovered that a bit of broken bone was pressing against the brain. So they have trephined and removed the pressure. Jack is still under the influence of anæsthetics, but they say that when he recovers consciousness he will recover reason with it. And now, my boy, I have taken up enough of your time. There is some one else waiting to see you—I do not think that you prefer my society to hers."

He pressed Mellish's hand and passed out of the room. A moment later the nurse, with a smile on her face—a kindly, tender smile—admitted a girl in white.

"Dick!" said the girl, softly, almost reverently, as she clasped both of his hands and bent her curly head over his. "My dear, noble Dick! And you took Jack's blame! You wouldn't tell? Oh, Dick, Dick, was there ever such a dear fellow?"

"All that doesn't matter, April, dear," he said, with infinite tenderness. "Don't give me credit I do not deserve. It was all selfish, after all, for it was all done for your sake. All! Even the race to Iloilo—was for you——"

She kissed him gently, then stood off at arm's length, holding his wasted face between her flower-like hands.

"And I said you were practical and everyday; that you had no romance in you. No romance, indeed!" Then she gave a sudden sob. "Oh, Dick, dear, think, I might have lost you!"

And they comforted one another in the manner of all true lovers.

TOLD IN STAGELAND

[NOTE—Every one, doubtless, remembers some experience in his life when everything seemed to be against him, when fortune was at its lowest ebb. We all have a sympathy for the person at that stage of his career, and we are always interested in the misfortunes that have been overcome by others. No class of people have more ups and downs than actors and actresses. We have induced some of the most prominent to tell what they regard as their bitterest experience. The following anecdotes are related by Lew Fields, James T. Powers, Louis James, Lillian Russell, Mme. Schuman-Heink, Jefferson DeAngelis, Guy Bates Post, Blanche Bates, Eva Davenport, Raymond Hitchcock, Maxine Elliott, John Slavin, Elmer S. Dundy, Edgar Selwin, Mme. Gadski, Blanche Ring, Frank Daniels and Otis Skinner.—THE EDITOR.]

One Cold December Night

IT was twenty odd years ago, one cold December night. I had met with but very little encouragement in the theatrical world at that time, and, having overslept myself on the train which bore me from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Leavenworth, Kansas, I found myself on the platform of the latter station, hungry and depressed in spirits. When I left St. Joe I knew I had the sum of seventy-eight dollars in my pocket. When I stood on the platform of Leavenworth I had but one single cent. I realized that a kindly stock-yards man with whom I had fallen into conversation had robbed me, and that the company of which I was a member had gone on to Kansas City.

The telegraph office was closed. I could not wire on for money; and it was bitter cold in Leavenworth that early morning. Across the street I saw a ray of comfort. It was an Italian fruit stand, displayed upon which were red apples and brown doughnuts. Each doughnut was marked "one cent," and so was each red apple. Remember, please, that I was inordinately hungry. And I had but that one penny in my pocket.

For fully five minutes I stood in front of that Italian stand, debating in my mind how I should spend my sole capital. Every time I looked at a doughnut I got hungry, and every time I looked at one of those red apples I got hungrier. I took the coin in my hand.

"I'll toss it up," I said to myself. "Heads, doughnut; tails, red apple."

I spun the coin in the air. It fell, and, striking against my outstretched palm, bounded off, and fell down an iron grating. The Italian was sorry for me in my misfortune, but explained that he could not lift the grating without the permission of the commissioner of public works. He further explained that he could not give me an apple or a doughnut without cash. And so I had to remain in Leavenworth for five hours, without food, until my collect telegram to Kansas City had been answered, and I was enabled to depart. But I have since thought how fortunate I was. Suppose I had been compelled to spend five hours in Atchison? I would have died.

Lew Fields

While the Landlord Waited

ALL actors have had their ups and downs, their days of success and failure; but, as a class, their troubles do not seem to take root, and are—seemingly, at least—cast off easily and without further thought.

In looking back over forty-one years of my professional life, I find only one occasion where I was placed in a situation that caused me, for the time, some little apprehension.

In Columbus, Ohio, after my season

in Louisville—my first, by the way—I was offered an engagement for the summer. I arrived in that town with anything but a plethoric pocketbook. I found that the manager had changed his mind as to date of opening. A week passed, another, and another, and then I realized that I was minus the *"quid pro quo"* to satisfy my landlord.

I cast about me to see my way out. An idea—winter overcoat, that cost me one hundred dollars. It was satin-lined, etc., but no use in caloric weather such as we were having. My prophetic soul, my uncle! No sooner thought than acted on; and I shortly had the wherewithal to grease the palms of my Boniface. Soon after our season opened and I was happy as a leading man, on twenty-five dollars per week, and, as they say in the fairy tales, I have lived happily ever since.

Louis James

All Work and No Money

WHEN members of the profession tell stories of their darkest days, they usually make reservations. Some of these memories are disturbing to the attitude of success, even after years of prosperity. However, we always feel eager to tell of our earliest attempts and failures, and mine probably were not unlike others in many respects.

We had been barnstorming in small towns throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin, and while I had a small part, there was not much salary attached to it. The manager told me, however, that if I would succeed in any undertaking, that I must not be afraid of work. I was assigned to various jobs to test my value—and the most pleasing ones to the company seemed to be of the manual order.

I worked all morning distributing bill posters, advertising the show, and spent the afternoons felling trees for the balcony scene of "Romeo and Juliet." I worked through the day, and had my few lines to say at night, in which I reveled in dreams of the future; but the hardest work I ever did was to try to get money from the box-office. I was promised five dollars per week and board, and had spent the whole season living on promises, and was finally kicked out by the manager because I asked for money.

Guy Bates Post

When I Was Twenty-One

A FEW years ago—I shall not tell how many—I served my apprenticeship upon the stage, and after each unsuccessful venture I returned home broke, and heard the familiar and family joke, "I told you so!" Still I held on to the belief that some day I would show them that the stage was for mine, and after spending a few weeks in the bosom of my family, and enjoying the fatted calf, I would wander forth again.

At this particular period I strayed so far West that I couldn't get back; and it lacked but two days of my twenty-first birthday.

"Oh, saving grace!" I exclaimed to an actor friend who was in the same boat. "On my twenty-first birthday the judge won't refuse me, so if we can scare up the price for a collect telegram, I believe he will come down handsomely."

After much thinking and rewriting, I finally sent the following message:

"Father, I am twenty-one to-day and broke."

How we hung around that Western telegraph office waiting—waiting for the wire that would soon put us on the sunny side of easy street!

At last, the next day, the answer came "collect." This was puzzling; however, I borrowed the price, and read my message from father:

"So was I, my boy, when I was twenty-one."

JAMES T. POWERS.

The Fire Peril

IT is a very difficult thing to say, after you have lived your trials down, "This was the very worst;" for woes of yesteryears take their places in the dim perspective, and are not of the prosaic, matter-of-fact to-day.

I suppose we can never truthfully say, "This is the worst experience"—so long as we live to say, "This is the worst." But I do remember two very troublesome accidents in my stage career that, to me, were of deep significance, because I felt the finality of earthly things. They occurred one in Hamburg and the other in New York, at the Metropolitan Opera House

Always upon first nights I am extremely nervous and intent upon my cues. So at this time, in Goldmark's "Merlin," in which I had assumed the part of *Fata Morgana,* I had taken my place in the wings, ready for my entrance, and by some mischance I came in contact with a live spark from an electric wire. My dress was of thin, gauzy material, and my hair was hanging round my shoulders. In a moment I was all ablaze—but I was so interested in the scene upon the stage, and of my coming part in it, that I was not aware that I was on fire; in fact, I did not feel the heat.

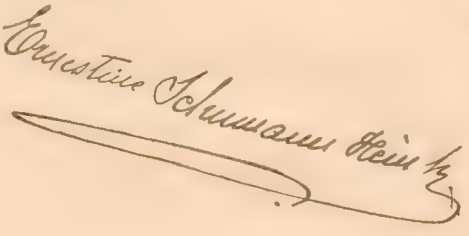
Suddenly a voice at my back said:

"Stand still—don't be frightened!" Then two brawny arms were around me, and with one sweep from shoulder to feet, the stage carpenter, with a bearlike hug, literally wiped out the flames.

My hair was burned, and I fear I was a sorry sight, but it was my time to go on the scene—where I nearly collapsed. My voice was shaking with fear of the danger I had escaped. I suffered keenly, and thought of my children being left alone to battle with the world—and I am sure the audience was disappointed that night in my voice.

On another occasion I had even a worse experience. We were presenting Verdi's "Falstaff," and in the dark scene, where *Falstaff* disappears in a basket through the floor, the trapdoor was carelessly left open, and, as the stage was dark, I could not see this, and walked into it.

Down, down I fell—with such force that the man below—whose arms were outstretched to break my fall—was severely wounded, while I escaped with only a dislocated shoulder. It was a frightful experience, and I shall not soon forget it.



The Coveted Hat

I HAVE had many a hoodoo day in my theatrical career, but the most surprising visit of that "unwelcome guest" occurred about four years ago in Paris. I was on a hurried trip to the Continent, and previous to my departure from New York had had considerable trouble in convincing my wife that she must remain at home. It required days of persuasion, and finally ended by a promise on my part that I would buy and bring her the finest bonnet in the French capital as a sop to her disappointment.

At last I was ready to leave Paris, and at the station I remembered my neglect to buy the hat. I jumped into a cab and stopped at one of the finest establishments. In a show case all by itself was a dream of a bonnet—feathers, lace and a gauzy straw.

"That is the bonnet for mine," I said to the salesman; but he shook his head, and told me that it was not for sale—only for exhibition.

"Well, that is the only thing I want in this shop, and if you won't sell it to me, I'll go to another," I declared.

The salesman consulted madame, the manager, and she consented to sell it to me. It was packed and sent up to the station for me by a messenger, and I was happy in the thought of a promise fulfilled.

But alas! my joy did not last long. When the precious package was untied, and the rolls of tissue paper removed, there was a pool of syrup in the bottom of the bandbox, and my wife thought it a joke that I had carried too far.

I had purchased a hat made of candy, and the hot air of the stateroom had melted feathers, straw and lace.

The Parisian salesman was right, it was a show hat—and I had paid the price.

JEFFERSON DE ANGELIS.

Watching the President's Wand

I WAS touring India, China and Japan s'teen years ago with my own English and comic opera company, and was induced by a Spanish syndicate to visit Manila, where I struck my first snag on the "encore" question. The theater at that time was controlled entirely by the government, and, as was the custom, the president, who sat in a box, signaled with a wand whether or not an encore should be given.

The opera was "Maritana," and *Don Cæsar* and I had just finished a long duet. We bowed and bowed to the applause, forgetting all about the president, who was wildly gesticulating, waving his wand for an encore. I tried to start my dialogue in the next scene. There was an awful row. I had quite innocently committed the atrocious crime of "insulting the public," and was only saved from arrest by making an apology in the morning papers.

But that was the preliminary canter. We gave our opera in English, and I consented to a general request to sing something in Spanish; but when I found the song selected for me was of a *risqué* nature, I declined to sing, and that settled me. I had again insulted the public, and for revenge, a Spanish artist was engaged to sing before the opera—and the public was invited to come to see the storm. The theater was packed, and my friends advised me, no matter what happened, to go ahead with my part, for the plot was to arrest me if I stopped and addressed them. The excitement was at topnotch when I entered. What a demonstration!—yells, howls, hoots and hisses on one side, and good old cheers on the other, which lasted, without cessation, until the end of the act.

Goodness knows what I sang and talked about, for I was almost scared to death, but I didn't let that howling mob suspect it. Suddenly a gendarme started to eject a Filipino, and then the fight began in earnest, a fight which ended in the arrest of thirty conspirators. Well, after that I owned the island, and was received by the governor general, but I never could learn to watch the president's wand.

Eva Davenport
Lew Fields Co.

An Intervention of Providence

THE worst-remembered day for me in my stage career occurred in Washington, D. C., at the Broadway Theater, not so very long ago.

I suppose most actor-folk will call what I am about to relate superstition, for they, as a majority, are superstitious; but I choose to ascribe my miraculous escape from death to my faith in Christian Science. Be that as it may, I am sure that this release from danger was due entirely to the intervention of Providence.

I was appearing in "The American Beauty," in a scene where for one of my songs I was obliged to stand in one particular spot in order to get the lime

light which, in this instance, was thrown from a point back of the stage.

As the time approached for my entrance, I took my position in the wings, to be in readiness, when suddenly I was seized with a violent pain in my eyes; so excruciating, that I stumbled toward the great white circle of light upon the floor, in the center of which I was expected to stand.

The pain in my eyes grew stronger as I neared the "white spot," and I found it utterly impossible to even cross the outer edge of it; so I stood in the dark and sang my song, or, rather, one verse of it, when suddenly a great weight broke loose from above, and came crashing through the floor, on the very spot covered by the lime light. Providentially I had escaped what to me was my very worst experience upon the stage.

LILLIAN RUSSELL.

For Lack of a Lead Pencil

IN certain parts of the country the "room with bath" is hard to round up in a sequence of one-night stands—just when it is most valuable. I won't designate the town of this experience, because I may have to visit it again. I was overdue for a dip when I reached the hotel in this place, and gave three cheers when I found the tub was a local institution. I had splashed around like a kid taking a stolen swim, when I found out that there were no towels in the room; also there was no telephone to the hotel office, and there was nothing but a hole in the wall where the electric button ought to be.

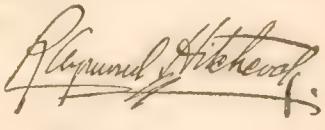
For drying myself there were these expedients—running up and down the room swiftly, converting the lace window curtains into crash, or sitting still and fanning myself with my hat. Recourse to these three, pieced out by a burning sense of injustice, enabled me to put on my clothes over a dry skin after a while, and then I tore downstairs to say something hard-boiled to the proprietor. When I had finished, he gave me a pitying smile, beckoned to me to follow, and led me to my room.

"It is very simple," he said. "Observe."

With this he took a lead pencil from his pocket, and inserted it in the hole where the button used to be. The wiring was still there, for in a minute up came a bell boy. The proprietor looked at me triumphantly, and left the room before I could think of anything appropriate to say.

The company still had some doubtful territory ahead. If it had been possible to can a few baths, I would have done it. Instead, I thought I would take another the same day, while the opportunity lasted. Secure in the knowledge that the room was not isolated, and despite the fact that towels were still missing, I jumped into the tub and tried to absorb water to the full capacity of the human frame.

Then I put a dripping hand into the pockets of my vest. There was no lead pencil there. My fountain pen was too big for the buttonless bell, and so was the handle of my tooth brush. By following the original program, I got dressed and started for the proprietor again. He wasn't in, but I was told I could find him across the street. Outside the door I encountered three blind men selling lead pencils.



From Tears to Wildest Laughter

MY hoodoo came most unexpectedly several years ago while touring the West in a series of melodramatic plays. I had the part of a young mother who was called to the battlefield to succor some wounded soldiers, and the weepy scene of separating from my young baby announced that the house was packed and plentifully supplied with handkerchiefs.

I embraced the baby—which was a

doll baby—convulsively, and put it into the hands of a trusted nurse, sobbing:

"Keep my child. To no other arms would I intrust my little son."

Then the hoodoo appeared. For, as I placed the baby in her arms, the head dropped off and rolled down to the footlights. The illusion was dispelled, and the house went wild.

MAXINE ELLIOTT.

Due to the Spiritualist

IT was when I was one of those weird things, a child actress, Neil Burgess was playing a protracted engagement at the Park Theater, Boston. He was appearing in "A County Fair," and was rehearsing "Neil Burgess' Circus." I played *Sallie* in the former, and was delighted to learn that in the forthcoming play I would have quite a sensational act to accomplish.

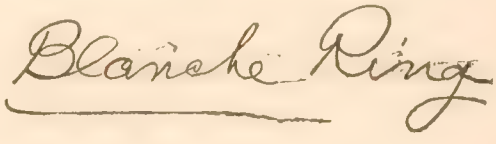
Cold Molasses—that was the horse Mr. Burgess used in his famous treadmill scene—was to be kept on the treadmill in the new bill, and I was to be suspended from invisible wires on his back and execute seemingly difficult bareback feats. It was the forerunner, you might say, of the aërial ballet since projected in Klaw & Erlanger extravaganzas.

The management expected a great deal from this specialty. Accordingly my salary had been raised five dollars, and I had swung about on the wire contrivance until I was black and blue and fairly dizzy. Still, I had the pride of an incipient artist, and I was young enough to feel that the whole world would shortly be looking on. To help along this notion, I had told all the young people in the neighborhood of my home in Boston what they might shortly expect to see at the Park; and I fancy I harbored the idea that when Cold Molasses got going, and I proceeded to skip about on the animal's back, the dramatic critics would give me headlines the next morning.

The point of the story, however, revolves around the fact that both Mr. and Mrs. Neil Burgess inclined to take counsel from a local spiritualist. On the Saturday before the date set for the first night of "Neil Burgess' Circus," they had a long *séance* with this more or less worthy individual, and among other signs that he read in the heavens was one to the effect that the young girl who had been selected to do the bareback "stunt"—in other words, myself—would break her neck in full view of the audience.

That settled me as far as concerned the center of the stage. The novelty was cut out at the next morning's rehearsal, and little Blanche Ring spent most of the time, for at least a week, in crying salt tears and dire vengeance upon all spiritualists.

That, in fine, is the one episode that shines out brilliantly from my career under the caption "Hard Luck." Since then I have probably had trials calculated to upset me much more than that did. Nevertheless, that particular one struck home with the greatest force.



The Hardest of all Hard Luck

WHEN you talk about hard-luck days, you ought to do it with your fingers crossed, for you never know when they will come again. I believe my earliest experience was the worst one—for I was young and unaccustomed to failures. The years bring dogged persistency to take the place of hope, and this quality has a better fighting chance with the world than faith.

At this particular time I was running a sheep range out in Montana, and what made my hard luck so unbearable was due to my happiness of the night preceding the misfortune.

I had been offered two hundred and fifty thousand dollars that evening for my sheep—and refused it. The next

morning, before breakfast, I was informed that not a sheep was left. All had been killed by the blizzard.

ELMER S. DUNDY.

A Secret for Two Years

I ASSOCIATE no unpleasant memories with my life on the stage, but yet, strange to say, my bitterest experience came because of my stage career. It was that period which most women like to remember, and hallow always with the tenderest regrets, because its existence is so brief; the period, in short, which precedes marriage.

For two years my engagement to my husband, Herr Tauscher, had been kept a secret, for the very diplomatic reason that the inflexible German law denied an officer of the army the right to marry a woman who appeared in a public profession. Herr Tauscher was an army officer, and I was obliged to keep our secret for two whole years. It was certainly my worst reminiscence.

MME. GADSKI.

Sacrificed His Prize Books

PERHAPS the most strenuous period of my "hard times" was also my happiest.

I doubt if I should care to live again through the experiences of that period, however, for alas! we grow no younger.

It was my first season on the stage, in the stock company of a minor theater of an Eastern city.

I had just tumbled out of the soft comfort of the parent nest, and had never known the necessity of earning my daily bread, but here I was put to it in earnest. The promised wage was small, but the parts intrusted to my youthful talents were glorious. What cared I if my worldly possessions were confined within the space of a garret bedroom, sumptuously furnished with a bed, a washstand and a chair, so long as I could find a vent for my genius in the low-browed character-villains in the current melodramas!

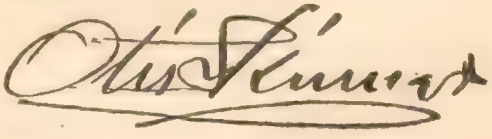
Even though salary day became more or less a movable feast, one's enthusiasm rose triumphant over baser considerations. No use asking aid from home; opposition to my determination had been so strong that I had burned my bridges.

I recall one day when I had been importuned for unpaid rent by an indignant landlady for the fifth time, I resolved to bring my manager to a proper realization of *his* financial responsibilities. He listened patiently to my demand, and then turned over a number of notices from the gas company.

"How can I give you salary when I have these to pay?" he said. "If I don't meet these payments, they'll turn off the gas; then where will you be?"

Sorrowfully I went to the garret room, and from a small zinc trunk I took a number of books, souvenirs of my prize-winning days at school, and carried them to a second-hand book store; and the result was a square meal at the best restaurant in town, and the smoothing of the war-wrinkled front of the landlady.

Moreover, when on Friday night the parts were given out at the theater for the drama of the following week, I received one of forty pages—the juvenile hero of the play, who held all the "fat" situations. Only one drop of bitterness in this cup of joy. Where in Heaven's name would I get the costumes to dress the part!



In the Balcony Scene

MY first appearance on the stage was the worst-remembered day in my mother's stage career. At this particular time she was playing in Australia, in that most romantic of Shaksperian plays.

In the meantime I was teething, fretful and unweaned, and was having a little scene of my own in the dressing room with the nurse—who could not quiet me.

The stage was set for the balcony scene of "Romeo and Juliet." Mother was seated upon a box on the balcony—hidden from the "front" by a wall of trellised vines—when I was put into her arms. The audience was listening breathlessly to *Romeo's* impassioned pleas, which came to a climax in the most unlooked-for way. The stage carpenter was careless, and the "super" who stumbled against the rail was awkward, for the front of the balcony collapsed with a bang, and Blanche Bates had the opportunity to receive the greatest ovation of her stage career.

There sat the fair, shy *Juliet* with her baby at her breast, and poor *Romeo's* scene was cut short by the howls of the audience, which refused to be quieted until the curtain came down.

BLANCHE BATES.

Before a New York Audience

I SUPPOSE every actor who makes his first bow to a New York audience will know pretty well how I felt a few years ago at the Casino, when I made my appearance in "The Wizard of the Nile." Talk about hardships, hunger, friendlessness and every other condition in the human category—why, the feeling of an actor before his first Gotham audience would make the horrors of the Inquisition look like a German picnic.

Beads of perspiration stood out in freezing bubbles all over my body, but I managed to live through it. I had promised my wife that I'd get home as quickly as possible after the performance, to let her know if it were a success—and I like to remember that, in this instance, I kept my word.

At the end of the first act I had several invitations to midnight suppers—which meant praise and the sugared things of life. That, I confess, would have impressed me, but there was some one over at Rye, at my home, waiting for the good word—and I found her waiting at the door.

"Is it a go?" she asked, anxiously.

"It is," I answered, and then she invited me to the ice box to eat some cheese and onions.

FRANK DANIELS.

The Reward of Persistence

MY only hard luck began regularly in my career; in fact, before my career really began; and thereby hangs this tale.

I had been "suping" with William Gillette's company, which was to make a London appearance in "Secret Service," when I was suddenly informed that the company contained one too many, and that I was "it."

I immediately applied for an engagement with a stock company down South, and was engaged on the strength of my association with "Secret Service." But alas! my new management left me in little doubt as to what they thought of my work; in fact, they had only one excuse for keeping me—they forgot to pay salaries, and whilst the various members of the company kept leaving as regularly as the proverbial ghost refused to walk, I clung on with tenacious persistence, playing many parts, much to the distress of small but select audiences, but gaining experience rapidly.

In the natural course of a company's career, we reached Rochester, where, to the joy of the management, business picked up tremendously, and it was in the second week of this unexpected prosperity that I received a summons to present myself before the management forthwith. With much trepidation, and a presentiment of coming evil, I wandered out "in front."

"You are now the only member of the original company," said my manager.

I nodded, weakly.

"You have had no salary previously, as I object to paying money under false pretense; but, while you have still much to learn as an actor, I feel in duty bound to acknowledge your loyalty, and, therefore, as I anticipate playing this town for eight weeks, here is your salary for that period in advance."

I think I fainted.

Edgar Selwyn

Stranded in Akron

IT was in Cleveland that I was jolted out of the vaudeville field and put into the path of more legitimate theatrical endeavor. I was doing a dancing specialty with one of the old-fashioned variety companies, which became so completely stranded in Akron that I was left with just money enough to buy a ticket to Cleveland. My parents were so much opposed to a stage career for me that I had to run away to join the variety show, and, to better hide my identity, changed my name from the good old German one of Jacob Miller to the beautiful Celtic one of John Slavin. I thought of the name Slavin because Bob Slavin, the famous minstrel of those days, was the man who taught me my first dancing steps.

Landing in Cleveland, I found my way to a theater which was then, I think, under the management of Mr. Drew and a Mr. Sackett. Fortunately they needed an extra turn to fill out their bill for the following week, but they did not need it badly enough to pay me more than eight dollars to do it for the week. I was half starved and weak, besides being frightened out of my wits, and I certainly did some "poor" dancing, even for the stipend I was to get at the end of the week. When the eight dollars was handed me Saturday night, I started away from the theater with a rush, determined, first of all, to buy a railroad ticket to Pittsburg, where Bob Slavin, with his own minstrel show, was to open on the following Monday.

As I started out of the stage door I was nabbed by the scruff of the neck and asked where I was going in such a tremendous hurry. I tried to explain, but the gruff voice of my captor told me it was one of the rules of the theater that all actors who worked during the week had to buy beer for the stage employees Saturday nights. My quick calculations showed that if I bought beer for the stage hands, I would not be able to pay my boarding-house bill and get the cut-rate ticket to Pittsburg.

Then I foolishly did the first thing that crept into my rattled brain; I began to fight as fiercely as my size and strength would permit, all the time holding the eight dollars in my clinched right fist. All of a sudden a policeman edged around the corner, and while the big stage hand busied himself getting out of sight, the officer subdued me with a welt or two on the head, and then took me to the police station.

In the police court Monday morning I was fined just enough to use up my hard-earned eight dollars. It was then I buried my pride. My tale of woe moved the manager of the telegraph office to the extent of letting me send a collect telegram to my father for money. The money came, and there was a fine, big club alongside the fatted calf when I got home a day later, just to help keep the day green in my memory for a long time.

Gee! but my father was a big, strong man in those days.

JOHN SLAVIN.

A CAMPAIGN OF CONQUEST

By W. Bert Foster

Here is an uncommonly good story of adventure on land and sea. One of the characters is a South American dictator who has used high-handed measures to enrich himself, and the plot of the narrative has to do with the audacious efforts of those whom he has defrauded to wrest from him his ill gotten gains.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL AND A GALE.

THE steel steamship *Mirrow,* built originally for the tea trade, and one of the finest of that fleet of craft which ply with the regularity of "liners" between New York and London, and Hongkong, Yokohama, Shanghai and Singapore, had been diverted from her familiar ocean path, and was bound to Bluefields and Aspinwall, touching at the several Mexican and Central American ports on her way.

Her owners were not superstitious men, and they cared little for the scruples of old sailors, and nothing at all for the trouble they were making the *Mirrow's* officers when they changed her destination in this way. According to Andrew Duff, her second engineer, who years before had worked for Bruce Hanson's father, this sending the steamship down to what he called "the Dago coast" was enough to hoodoo her for all time.

"I don't wonder them heathen are sore," he grunted, with a wave of his hand forward, speaking in an undertone to Bruce the day after that young man came aboard at Vera Cruz.

"The owners don't care a rap how much trouble they stir up for us. The Malays in the fo'castle, the Lascars in the fireroom, and even the 'Chinks,' so the chief steward tells me, are turning rusty.

"Tough-looking crew, says you? Well, they're no better and no worse thar the crews of other tea ships. The whole fleet is manned by just such slant-eyed, yaller-faced heathen. And they're suspicious and don't like this change of route, now, I tell ye!

"The head oiler down below has had eight of his men out for a lashin' a'-ready, and I heard the bo'sun givin' his gang Jesse yesterday. They could all make it mighty unpleasant for us if they wanted, you know; an' no white man durst touch 'em."

"Why not?" Bruce demanded, lazily, leaning well back in his deck chair under the awning. "I thought officers aboard ship did about as they pleased with the crew."

"Not with them Malays and Lascars, you bet! Lemme tell you, no white officer who knows his business—not even an old 'bucko' mate—would dare hit one o' them same yaller boys," said Duff. Then he made the gesture of a man striking quickly with a knife, using his pipe to represent the weapon. "That's what!"—grimly. "A poke in the ribs his first dark night watch on deck.

"If the man he struck didn't do it, another would. Being all of the same

family, or tribe, the insult might, according to their creed, be properly avenged by any of the crew."

"Nice people," Bruce observed.

"Best men on a steamship you ever saw. Their *serangos* know how to make 'em work."

"By the way, you said the head oiler beat the firemen this trip, and the boatswain ballyragged the crew," suggested the young man, suddenly. "What happened to *them?*"

"Oh, they're not white. You see, these Malays and Lascars are really all slaves. They are shipped in Singapore by their *got-serang*, under the absolute dominion of their *serangos*. The *got-serang* is sort of a combination of shipping agent, boarding-house keeper and feudal chief. They've got to obey him; it's their religion.

"The bo'sun is the boss of the Malays, and he licks 'em if he wants to. The head oiler—a pompous little cuss, he is—is the patriarch and high priest. He's really a bigger man than the bo'sun. They're all Mohammedans, you know, and have to live and eat and worship aboard ship about as they do at home."

"Quite interesting," said Bruce Hanson; "but not so much so as that stunning party yonder in the blue frock. By Jove! Duff, who is she?"

The passenger he referred to had just passed their station under the amidships awning on the upper deck. She was young, lithe, dressed plainly, but carried herself with some haughtiness; and the fat little man who trotted by her side kowtowed as desperately to her as though she were a princess.

Bruce had noted the fact that the *Mirrow* did not boast a very long passenger list, and this young lady was really the first person who had attracted more than his passing glance.

"Huh!" grunted old Duff, the woman hater; "you youngsters are all alike. Get your eye on a woman and you lose your head at once. Half the brass buttons aboard are losing their sleep over that one a'ready."

"And such a woman!" murmured Bruce. "I swear she's worth it, Duff."

The girl had turned now, and was pacing back the length of the deck. Her face matched her figure—high-bred, perhaps a trifle haughty, but with nobleness mingled well with kindliness in her glance.

"Say, who is she, Duff?" cried the young fellow, under his breath. "I never saw a girl like her before."

"Miss Gratton. Melville Stump's niece. Heard of *him*, I s'pose?"

"Well, naturally, I've heard of Melville Stump," admitted Bruce, with a certain loss of eagerness in his tone. "He's notorious enough. So that's his niece, is it?"

Yet his gaze continued to follow the figure in blue, and Duff smiled again, grimly. "I didn't know Stump had any relatives," the young man at last observed.

"A man usually has some kith and kin, if he hasn't friends," the engineer remarked. "That girl is Ben Gratton's daughter. She's going down to Bluefields to meet her father, I'm told. And if it wasn't for Ben Gratton, Melville Stump would be impossible."

"Seems to me I've heard father speak of a Gratton in connection with Melville Stump. Eccentric old fellow, isn't he? Had some trouble with the government over a franchise, or the like, didn't he?"

Duff chuckled. "Gratton is 'the man who never comes home.' He's a man without a country. Years ago he owned several very rich concessions in one of these Dago republics—I forget which one.

"There was the usual upheaval, and the incoming administration bunkoed Gratton out of his franchises. He complained to the United States State Department, but, for reasons never satisfactorily explained, it would not take up his cause.

"So he shook the dust of the States off his feet for good, and has wandered about the world ever since. Why, he's been a passenger on this very ship in Chinese waters. He's the greatest globe trotter you ever saw."

"And he never comes home?"

"Never. Swears he won't step on

United States soil again until the government does its duty by him. But he's not above taking a lot of good money out of Wall Street every year, just the same."

"How's that?"

"Through Melville Stump. I tell you, Stump wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for Ben Gratton. Gratton supplied the money which put Stump in the Street. Melville Stump didn't have a cent of his own in the first place. He's Gratton's wife's brother.

"He's just as sharp as they say he is, I fancy; but he couldn't do much without the backing Gratton's millions give him. That fat man with the girl is one of Stump's agents, I understand. The girl's been to school in the States, and Mr. Joplin—the fat man's name—is taking her to meet Gratton."

"Well, she's a stunner," admitted Bruce.

The engineer had been casting, now and again, an inquiring eye toward the western horizon, where black clouds were slowly gathering. He arose, stepped across to the rail, and, shielding his eyes under the sharp of his hand, looked long at this threatening point.

"I'm nae weatherwise," he said, coming back after a bit; "but it strikes me we'll see bad weather before long. Those are queer clouds yonder, youngster."

Bruce only grunted, for at the moment it must be confessed that he was a deal more interested in the niece of the notorious Wall Street manipulator of stocks. Stump had no enviable reputation among thinking people; but even a well-grounded prejudice against him in Bruce Hanson's mind could not deter the young fellow from continuing his interested observation of Miss Gratton.

"Duff, I'm going to get acquainted with her—you see if I don't!" he told the engineer.

"I wish you joy of your task," muttered the engineer, his gaze still on the growing storm cloud.

As a landsman, Bruce had little interest in threatening weather. To his mind, the *Mirrow* was too big a vessel to be disturbed by any ordinary storm.

He saw the passengers desert the deck with some amusement, while the sky grew overcast. Even the fat Mr. Joplin disappeared; but the young fellow noted that the girl in blue had the pluck to remain, despite the rising of both sea and wind.

Duff went below before long, and in an hour his prophecy of nasty weather was being fulfilled. The sky was completely shrouded, and a darkness dwelt upon the sea lightened only by brilliant electric flashes in the east. The waves leaped sullenly against the drab sides of the *Mirrow*.

Officers were running hither and yon. The Malay crew, bundled in pea-jackets and mittens—for they quickly felt the change in the temperature—were busy lashing down every movable article to the decks.

The few remaining passengers were hurrying below. Bruce had been warned down himself, but he was too much interested in watching the scene. As he passed the after saloon entrance, however, he saw the girl in the blue gown tacking across the wet deck toward the door, and hastened to assist her.

It was a good chance to begin an acquaintance, for social customs have to be strained aboard ship. But the driving spray was in Miss Gratton's eyes, and she did not even glance at him.

"Thank you, sir," she murmured, as she passed through the doorway, leaving Bruce no opportunity of replying.

"By Jove! she took me for one of the officers," he muttered, with a short laugh. "Guess the moment was not propitious for the beginning of an acquaintance, after all. I must see this out before *I* go below, girl or no girl."

The scene fascinated him, for he by no means realized that serious danger could threaten the big ship. He had heard of the violence of these Gulf hurricanes; but although the *Mirrow* rolled unpleasantly, he clung to a life line, which had been stretched along the upper deck, and calmly watched the

armies of the storm maneuvering for the attack.

Down swept the gale at last, driving before it stinging sheets of drift whipped from the crests of the leaping waves. He was blinded—made breathless, indeed—by the onslaught; yet he clung to his position, being well wrapped in a raincoat and with his hat tied down over his ears.

No rain fell; but before long he was conscious of a dull roaring sound which came seemingly from a vast distance, and strained his vision, between the blinding gusts, to discover what this noise might mean. Sometimes the throbbing of the engines all but drowned the murmur; but it was not to be silenced, and finally rose triumphant above the minor noises of thundering waves, stamping engines and shrieking gale.

The young fellow, fresh from the humdrum round of his father's offices in Galveston, enjoyed the experience to the full. He beheld, with keen delight, and no thought of real danger, the clouds writhing into goblin shapes above the ragged sea. Their ever-changing shapes were hurrying, hurrying before the blast. In the mid-distance the waves, like a ravenous wolf-pack, leaped higher and higher to tear at the whitened edges of the clouds.

Suddenly, above the shriek of the wind and the bursting of the waves against the ship's hull, and even more penetrating than the mysterious roaring sound, a human cry rang out. A group of officers above him, the members of which were gazing eagerly ahead, warned Bruce that the cause for the shriek was to be found in that direction. He changed his position so as to have an unobstructed view over the *Mirrow's* bows.

The clouds seemed whirling in a vast pool, the center of which was swelling rapidly downward until it became cone-shaped—the strangest cumulus formation of vapor Bruce Hanson had ever observed.

And while he stared at the phenomenon, up from the sea leaped a tall, writhing spout of water, which met and welded with the whirling cloud. Bruce was transfixed with amazement. He had seen the birth of a huge waterspout!

The sea about the base of the writhing column boiled as though heated by subterranean fires. The waves leaped upward about the spout, attracted and magnetized by the whirling column, and then, in great sheets of spray, were cast far and wide over the sea. In the same manner on land, heavy articles are sometimes caught up by the funnel of a tornado.

It was plain now whence came the roaring noise which deafened them. Wild shrieks and a gabble of foreign words reached young Hanson's ears, between the gusts of the hurricane, from the forward deck, where the Malay crew were gathered to watch the waterspout now sweeping down upon the *Mirrow*.

Nor were those officers whom Bruce saw about him without some fear. The landsman did not as yet understand the danger which menaced the steamship.

Once caught in the swirl of the waterspout, however, the *Mirrow* would be sadly crippled, if not utterly wrecked. The spout was quite two cables' length in height, and if it collided with and broke over the steamship, thousands upon thousands of tons of water would be vomited upon her decks.

The officers, then, knew the situation to be extremely perilous. A command from the chief officer set a gang of men at work uncovering the long brass cannon amidships. A shot from this weapon might, by chance, break the spout.

So swiftly did the monster descend upon the ship, however, that this attempt was but wasted energy. Before the cannon could be loaded and the lanyard pulled, the *Mirrow* was within the circle of the boiling sea. Changing her course twice had not saved her; she acted like a magnet for the down-rushing waterspout.

For a moment the wind was stilled, the suck of the whirling pillar of water and cloud forming a vacuum. Then a chill blast, which accompanied the

spout like an attendant evil sprite, whistled about the ship. A man's voice could not have been heard in that moment of suspense.

Sheets of spray swept the *Mirrow's* decks; the vessel staggered in the wash of the spout's passage; darkness descended upon the pitching and groaning vessel like a pall.

Clinging with both hands to the life line, Bruce Hanson expected at last to be overwhelmed. Within these few final seconds only, had he appreciated the magnitude of the threatening peril, and his voice was added to the blast-driven screams of those about him.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW OF COMING EVENTS.

The officers as well as the crew of the *Mirrow* were panic-stricken; Bruce Hanson need have felt no shame at his own terror. During those few minutes, while the decks remained in a smother of foam and stinging spoondrift, it seemed impossible that the steamship, huge as she was, could escape destruction.

She rolled frightfully, the seas poured over her bulwarks, and every man, excepting those on the bridge, was waist deep or more in water. Bruce came near being carried away by the flood; but he continued to cling with a desperate grip to the life line.

His mind reverted to the helpless passengers below. There were few women and children aboard; yet the fact that the steamship threatened to sink without giving these a chance to escape from the cabins turned the young man fairly sick.

And among them to go down to a horrible death, if the *Mirrow* sank, was that girl in the blue frock, who had so interested the young fellow. "It's too bad she didn't stay on deck with me," was his thought as a second wave went over him.

But then the great steamship rose to the seas and shook herself free. Hanson's eyes cleared, and he could see the length of the decks, with their broken and twisted railings and smashed gear.

The waterspout had passed mercifully by, and the staggering *Mirrow* was saved from a fate that many a goodly vessel has suffered; but by a margin so narrow that it seemed miraculous. The whirling column of water fled to the westward, the gray waves leaping up about it like a pack of wolves surrounding a running deer.

Seafaring men see many strange sights, endure marvelous escapes; so the company on deck quickly recovered itself. The chief officer called the bo'sun, and soon all hands were removing the débris caused by the pounding waves, and repairing the broken bulwarks.

The passengers, who had scurried below at the early threatenings of unpleasant weather, never knew how near the *Mirrow* had been to her end. But the officers and crew were deeply impressed by the marvelous escape, and Bruce Hanson, too, appreciated the ceremony which, on the following day, when the weather was fair again, was undertaken by the coolie crew.

It was a Mohammedan feast day, the curious passengers were informed; but Duff whispered to Bruce Hanson that the Malays and Lascars were celebrating the wonderful escape of the ship from the waterspout.

The head oiler, a lean little man, with the marks of self-flagellations on his shoulders and arms, and deeply sunken eyes, removed his working clothes and appeared upon the forward deck in a priestly robe. Some of the passengers seemed vastly amused by the ceremonial bearing of the coolies, but Bruce was interested, and from her deck chair, where she reclined—the atmosphere was quite tropical again after the storm—Miss Gratton watched the scene with close attention.

Bruce had as yet made no attempt to become introduced to Miss Gratton; there had been too much excitement after the passing of the waterspout the day before for him to seriously go about this matter. But now he gradually edged around to her side of the

deck as the passengers idly watched the proceedings of the Mohammedan priest.

A sheep had been brought up, and this animal the head oiler now threw to the deck and slew with one stroke of his long knife, while his brethren stood about and chanted weirdly. Few white men have been privileged to observe these ceremonies upon the part of a tea ship's crew; and knowing what the service really meant to these solemn, brown little men, Bruce looked on with becoming reverence.

Miss Gratton's maid and traveling companion, a young woman named Burton, turned ill and ran away at sight of the sheep's heart torn from its still quivering body; even the fat Mr. Joplin had left the young lady alone. Bruce would have been delighted had Miss Gratton noticed him; but she evidently did not suspect that he was the individual who had helped her to the cabin when the gale broke the day before. And the young American was not the only male member of the ship's company who covertly watched her with admiring eyes.

The droning of the chant went on uninterruptedly. The priest, his wild eyes afire, sprinkled the circle of worshipers with blood. Part of the sheep's carcass was sent down to the galley to be cooked; but the dripping heart and the remainder of the flesh were cast overboard—as a propitiatory offering to the sea god, perhaps.

Some time later the cooked flesh was brought up in the sailors' pans and delivered to the coolies, who sat in a circle on the hot deck, chattering in Cingalese. Miss Gratton still occupied her chair under the awning within view of the jabbering crew, and although most of the other passengers had retired, Bruce hovered about in the vicinity, to the open but grim amusement of old Duff, the second engineer.

The feast of mutton was a part of the religious ceremony, and was begun with marked gravity by the coolies. Bruce crossed to the weather side of the deck, and as he passed the squatting circle his shadow chanced to fall boldly upon the pan which had been set down before the head oiler, who still wore his priestly robe.

With a volley of oaths and maledictions in Cingalese, the coolies sprang up. Dire threats flashed from the eyes of Malay and Lascar alike at the unconscious American. The head oiler—known as "Gabe" to the officers, his own name being unpronounceable—bounded across the deck, his lean hand upon the handle of the knife which, still bloody from the sacrifice, hung in his sash.

"Look out, there, Mr. Hanson!" shouted Duff, coming on the run. "None o' that, Gabe! Whatee for make kill?"

Bruce, whose gaze had been upon Miss Gratton rather than upon the coolies, was warned by the expression upon the young girl's face to turn in time to dodge the head oiler. He sprang aside, while Duff's command stayed the Lascar almost in mid air.

"Get out of here, you fool boy!" exclaimed Duff, seizing Bruce's arm and drawing him away from the infuriated crew, one of which grabbed the pan of food and flung it over the steamer's rail.

"What's the matter? What have I done?" gasped the astonished passenger.

"Your shadow fell across his meat; that's deadly contamination on a day like this, you being a Christian and he a Mohammedan." Then he muttered in Hanson's ear, as they went aft, while casting a quick glance backward at the scowling face of the head oiler:

"What did I tell you about them heathen? Now, you keep out of the way of Gabe for the rest of the voyage. Your shadow falling on his food was a deadly insult—one that he'll not forget for one while."

But, truth to tell, Bruce gave the incident little serious thought. He was more interested in the fact that at last Miss Gratton's attention had been called to him. She had dropped back into her chair, and her gaze followed him as he went along the deck with Duff.

"Come, now! We're getting on,"

thought the young fellow, with immense satisfaction. "Miss Hauteur has condescended to notice me. Here's a more or less dull trip before us both. What's the matter with our becoming acquainted, I want to know?"

But the good comradeship born of a sea voyage flourishes only in fair weather. Under other conditions, all but the most hardened voyagers mainly lose their interest in the society of their fellows.

Bruce saw Miss Gratton below after dinner that evening—the wind had risen again and the sky frowned upon the darkening sea as the sun went down—and schemed for an introduction to her through the chief officer. But that individual, when flatly asked to carry young Hanson's card to the lady, as flatly refused.

"Miss Gratton does not wish to meet anybody. I was informed of that fact by Mr. Joplin when they first came aboard. I could not undertake the responsibility, sir," declared the chief.

"Then I'll get at Joplin," decided Bruce.

So he set his snares for entrapping the agent of the great Melville Stump, financial king of Wall Street. As earlier introduced, Joplin was of rotund body, and possessed shoulders both broad and plump—so plump, indeed, that they gave him the appearance of carrying a hump on his back.

Bruce eyed the fat little man the next morning with much interest as they both tried to pace the pitching deck of the *Mirrow*. None of the other passengers seemed to be abroad—it was before the bugle call for breakfast—and Bruce was about to hail him, when an accident occurred which literally threw them together.

As Joplin tacked across the slippery deck, making for a door which gave entrance on the smoking cabin, evidently having had quite enough knocking about for a morning constitutional, down plunged the *Mirrow* as though she intended to bury her nose fathoms deep in the foam-streaked sea. At the moment, too, a great froth-capped wave curled up over the rail upon that side, and suddenly discharged itself in a four-foot flood into the lane between the deckhouse and the bulwark.

Quantities of water spurted through the vents as the steamship rose again; but the alley was waist-deep for several moments with the seething deluge.

Bruce shouted and seized a line; but poor little Joplin received the bulk of the wave squarely in the back. He was overturned like a barrel; he rolled and tumbled and sputtered as the water overwhelmed him. Hanson's shout turned to a scream of laughter; but as the flood roared along the deck, bearing Joplin upon its murky bosom, Bruce saw that the tubby little man was in danger of real injury.

Still holding to the line with one hand, he stretched forth the other and caught the tail of Joplin's coat as he was carried by. The course of the flotsam Joplin was stayed, and when the flood had swept entirely aft, spurting in geysers from the hawse holes, Bruce held up the saturated and panting little man until he regained both his feet and his wind.

"My—dear—young—friend!" gasped Joplin, clinging wildly to the arm of Hanson, who was likewise in rather a dampened condition. "You are—certain—ly my pre—server! I—I was never so—near—near drowning in my —life!"

These remarks he volleyed forth between gasps; but finally he found Bruce Hanson's hand, and shook it gratefully. "Get me below out o' this!" he cried, as he saw several grinning officers enjoying his discomfiture. "I'll be eternally obliged to you."

On the strength of this gratitude Bruce thought he could safely sound the little man on the topic of an introduction to Miss Gratton. After he had changed his own apparel and eaten breakfast, he observed the young lady and her maid sitting together in a retired corner of the saloon, and he forthwith hunted up Joplin in the smoking room.

"She don't know what she's missing," thought this exceedingly modest young man. "I could make the voy-

age a lot more pleasant for her, if she'd let me."

So, after he had endured Joplin's expressions of gratitude, he sprang his wish upon the millionaire's agent. The latter's eyes bulged, and his pudgy face displayed much startled amazement. "Introduce you to Miss Gratton?" he gasped.

"Sure. She looks like a nice girl."

"But, my — dear — boy! I really couldn't do it," exclaimed Joplin, shaking his head negatively, until he reminded Bruce very strongly of one of those mechanical figures one sometimes sees in shop windows, which, once set in motion, seem likely never to stop.

"Why, I'm quite a decent sort," Bruce said, smiling. "You can find out all about me from the captain. Everybody knows my father's house—none better known along the Gulf coast."

"I do not doubt it in the least," declared Joplin, continuing to wag his head, his fat face puckered into a most serious expression. "But I would no more dare introduce you to Miss Gratton than I would dare tell you the secrets of my employer, Mr. Melville Stump. You don't know that young lady, sir—you don't know her!"

"That's a fact, Joplin; I don't," admitted Bruce, calmly pulling at his cigar. "But I want to, and I see no valid reason why I shouldn't. Passengers on a steamship always set custom aside; but Miss Gratton stands aloof, as though she were made of different clay from the rest of us. I'll bet she'd be a good sort if one knew her. Come, Joplin, that's a good fellow; you'll ask her if she has any objections to meeting me?"

"Not for the world, Mr. Hanson—not for the world!" declared Joplin. "I wouldn't dare take the liberty, sir."

"What! Not merely to ask if she'd meet me?"

"No, sir; not even that."

"Why not?" demanded Bruce, flatly. "You say you're her uncle's confidential man, and she's in your care; you're her guardian *pro tem.*, as it were."

"You don't understand, my young friend," said Joplin, shaking his head again in his solemn way. "The great Stump does honor me with his confidence, but—but—well, sir, his niece does not! She treats me as a servant, sir—as a servant!" The twinkling little eyes set in the agent's pudgy face snapped wrathfully. "Me, sir—Herman P. Joplin! She considers me in the same category as Burton, her maid."

Hanson carefully hid a smile, and said: "That is quite surprising, sir. You are a man of parts, Joplin; you must be, or Melville Stump would not trust you with his confidence."

The other blushed with pleasure. "A friend I may say I am to the great financier, Mr. Hanson," he declared. "But that fact alone is sufficient to make Miss Gratton my enemy. She did not wish me to accompany her on this voyage; but her uncle insisted. You see, the young woman has taken a remarkable dislike—a re-mark-a-ble dis-like," he repeated, in a manner which expressed wonder, "to Mr. Stump. It is astounding. Within the past year she has quarreled with him seriously, and because of this quarrel she now goes to meet her father. You have heard of *his* eccentricities?"

"I've been told he never visits the United States."

"Quite right, sir. He is a very peculiar man; and perhaps his daughter inherits some of his oddities."

"You don't mean to say Miss Gratton isn't right in her mind?" exclaimed Bruce, with a doubtful smile.

"Oh, not at all—not at all!" Joplin hastened to assure him, yet he flushed a little. "Only—er—peculiar. But her father is not a person of well-balanced mind; that is self-evident."

"He's smart enough to make money, they say."

"He's enormously wealthy, Mr. Hanson; but, between you and me, the increase in his wealth is greatly due to Mr. Stump's manipulations on 'change."

"Is that the general opinion?" queried Bruce, remembering Duff's story.

Mr. Joplin blushed again, as though the suggestion implied by the query were a personal affront. "I do not know what the general opinion may be," he snapped; "but such is the fact, nevertheless. Melville Stump has made Benjamin Gratton the wealthy man he is to-day."

There seemed nothing to be made by pressing Joplin further; however, Hanson's desire for an introduction to the haughty daughter of Benjamin Gratton was by no means abated. Being a persevering fellow, the very fact that obstacles opposed the culmination of his wish merely added to his determination.

Miss Blanche Gratton seemed quite unconscious of his transparent attempts to gain her attention. That afternoon she ventured out upon the open deck with her maid to walk a little. The maid looked woefully white, but the wind gave her mistress a fine color, and Bruce thought the young lady seemed to take rather a wicked delight in making Burton walk up and down with her.

A gang of the dark skinned sailors were at work near by under Yusuf, the bo'sun. Bruce, in spite of Duff's warning, thought little of the incident which had occurred the day before, when his shadow had fallen across the food of the chief oiler; but he noticed now that the sailors scowled at him as he passed them.

A moment later, as he paced down the deck toward Miss Gratton and her maid, and had his back to the men, a heavy spar, which they had been lashing fast, broke loose and came within an ace of knocking Bruce off his feet. An officer came running forward, and said something to Yusuf in an angry tone; the bo'sun chattered a volley of Cingalese at his men; but Bruce took the accident good-naturedly.

"It's all right, sir," he said to the officer. "I was in the way. No harm done."

But as he came further aft he met Miss Gratton's maid. "You are the gentleman who had some trouble with those men yesterday?" she asked, abruptly. Burton was not a pleasant looking girl, and she said this rather sullenly, Bruce thought.

"Why, there was some small row over me, I believe," the young fellow admitted, rather amazed.

"Those men let go of that timber, then, on purpose. You had better take care." She would have turned her back on him then and hurried after her mistress into the cabin had not Bruce detained her with a question.

"Thank you very much for your interest—or was it your mistress who sent you?" he asked.

The girl's black eyes flashed with sudden anger. "My mistress did not send me. She has no interest in you, sir," she declared, and left him.

"But that was a fib, nevertheless," muttered Bruce, following her departing figure, and that of Miss Gratton's, with thoughtful gaze.

CHAPTER III.

PERIL THREATENS.

Bruce Hanson happened to be a fellow who took life lightly, although, when occasion arose, he could be serious enough. The incident of the spar was not strongly impressed upon his mind, therefore; he did not even mention it to his friend, the second engineer.

"Old Duff's a bird of ill-omen, anyway. And what's the use of getting any of those heathen into trouble with the captain? They may not like me, but that's no reason why they should try to knock me off my pins."

So the warning that was brought him by the sullen Burton did little but make him the more eager to meet that young woman's mistress. He held the supposed peril lightly; but he chafed over being kept at arm's length by Miss Blanche Gratton.

"By Jove! what if her father and uncle are millionaires? My dad has a little loose change himself, and I may have some, too, in time," muttered Bruce. "She's as proud as a princess, and—and—well, she's a confounded

sight prettier than any princess with whose charms I am familiar," and he chuckled. "Suppose I shouldn't care much for her if I knew her well, anyway; but it's tantalizing as it stands."

And he went off and tackled the officers in rotation, from Captain Merrithew down to the purser; but none of them would take the responsibility of introducing him to Benjamin Gratton's daughter. The girl had refused to meet a single person on the passenger list. There were few ladies besides herself, anyway; and the traveling men and foreigners who made up the male portion of the company were not attractive people. Even Bruce found few in whom he could take any interest.

At Campeache, however, there came aboard an individual who held Hanson's attention from the moment he hove in view. A queerer bird, at first sight, Bruce had never laid eyes upon.

He was the single passenger who boarded the *Mirrow* at Campeache, and came off in the lighter, bearing a monstrous green and red plaid carpetbag, which sported brass corners and a lock of huge proportions. His dress was the more or less soiled white linen suit of tropic countries, and a battered helmet. He did not look to be overburdened with this world's goods, but was much too shrewd appearing and "canny" to lead one to believe he had neglected any opportunity for pelf which may have come his way. He was of Duff's nationality—that was plain. A tall, rawboned, red-haired and bewhiskered Scot, with a steely eye and a humorous twist to his thin lips.

Bruce became acquainted with this passenger before the *Mirrow* had dropped the whitewashed town, with its shallow bay and breakwater, below the horizon. The steward put the Scot at Bruce's elbow at dinner.

"Mr. Fergus MacDowell, Mr. Bruce Hanson," said the steward, softly.

"Air ye English, Mr. Hanson?" queried the newcomer, with beetling red brows, pausing with soup spoon in mid air.

"Yankee."

"Good! Your hand, sir. I'm proud to know a man from the States. But no English—not now, sir!"

Bruce was amused. "Have you severed your connection with Edward the Seventh?" he asked.

"I have that. I'm a man without a country," said the Scot, gloomily.

"Remarkable!" exclaimed the American. "See the lady yonder—the striking-looking girl in blue? She is going to meet her father at Bluefields, another man without a country. He has shaken the dust of the States from his sandals, I believe."

"No!"

"So they say. Benjamin Gratton—enormously wealthy. Used to be interested in South American concessions. Got bit. State department wouldn't back him up. Severed connection with the land of the free—like our old friend, William Waldorf Astor. And like that last-named gentleman, he derives an enormous income from the land which he does not consider good enough to live in."

"Marvelous!" exclaimed the Scot, forgetting to eat. "My case exactly—exactly."

Hanson's eyes twinkled. "You don't look it, Mr. MacDowell. Let me congratulate you. Both Gratton and Astor are counted extremely wealthy men."

The shot went home, but as Bruce expected, the other appreciated the joke. He smiled slowly and broadly.

"There's a wee bit difference," he admitted, with a wink. "But I was in a fair way to make a good thing—right down here in Sayab—if me own government had given me the assistance I had a right to demand as a loyal subject of his majesty."

He grew gloomy then; but after dinner, under the influence of the best cigar Bruce could offer him, the Scot narrated his story. And the young American found it, as well as the narrator himself, vastly interesting.

Fergus MacDowell was yet to see his thirtieth birthday; but he had knocked about the world—especially

about the Mexican and Central American states—more than a little. He was by profession a "promoter"; and he had made money by his trade, as has many another energetic spirit in these countries, where the blood of the natives seems fairly stagnant.

"The only thing to which them yaller men are awake is revolutions," said Mac, in disgust. "They're fine on that.

"Let me tell ye, Mr. Hanson, a prideful Don and half a dozen *peons* can start a revolution in any of these vest-pocket republics before breakfast, and at supper time there'll likely be a new president and cabinet, and a new government altogether, runnin' quite as good as the one they had overnight!

"That's what happened in Sayab. Hernando Rivera was the cause of me overthrow. I'd won out on two or three small contracts—one right back there in Campeache; so I went in for a bigger thing down in Sayab.

"I'll tell ye what it was; maybe ye've heard of the Coffee Narrow Gauge Line? That's what it's called. Allison & Campbell went broke on it. I got a concession from the government and took up their work; blasted away a cliff, turned a watercourse, dug a hundred and fifty-foot tunnel, and there she was—solid roadbed, and as good steel rails as ever came from Pittsburg.

"It's a trolley to bring down the coffee from the hills, and it was paying me great!" He rolled his eyes and smacked his lips. "Say!" leaning forward and patting Hanson's knee softly, "I had a hundred thousand in hard cash when Rivera came to town.

"I didn't think he'd win, and turned him down hard when he asked me to help back his measly little revolution. But he happened to strike the people in a dull season, when there wasn't much doing; they were ripe for an overturn, anyway.

"Well!" He smoked in silence for a minute, sighed, and added: "He played me for a monkey all right; grabbed the narrow gauge, even swiped my strongbox—I had a traitor of a servant—and sent me packing.

"I communicated with the British legation at Honduras. The government had its own troubles—South Africa and Persia, you know. I was only a Scotchman, anyway. They ignored me. And Rivera, getting bold, run me out of Sayab, *in*-tirely!

"No reason for being sore? Well!"

Bruce had Mr. Duff up to meet his fellow countryman; but the engineer did not exactly approve of Mac.

"He's a reckless cheil," Duff declared, in private, to the younger man. "I've heard of him from one of the pilots. It was a great row he got into down in Sayab. He'll be stood ag'in a wall and shot as full of holes as a colander, if ever he lands there again."

"I admire his pluck," said Bruce.

"Ah, ye're as rash as MacDowell yerself. There's a pair o' ye," growled Duff.

"Why do you say that?"

"I saw ye standin' 'round as careless as could be, back yon at Campeache, when Yusuf and his gang were hoisting in the lighter's cargo. I tell ye them heathen have it in for ye. Gabe has an evil eye whenever ye come down into the engine room."

But Hanson only laughed. He saw little reason for fearing a lot of little brown heathen who lived in an entirely different part of the ship. Besides, he looked forward, with humanity's usual shortsightedness, to a prompt completion of his voyage on the *Mirrow*.

And he possessed too active a mind to content himself with books or card playing in the smoking cabin. It was his first voyage in a big vessel, and really a steamship like the *Mirrow* is a wonderful creation.

She was as heavily manned on this cruise as she would have been were she bound, as usual, on the long voyage to Chinese waters. She was like a floating town, with her various businesses and her different classes of society.

Every person engaged in the working of the ship, in the feeding of her passengers and crew, in the care of her engines and furnaces, many pumps, and other mechanical gear, or in the man-

agement of any and all of these departments, was as regularly employed as though he or she were engaged in similar duties ashore.

The passengers seldom saw many of the workmen so busily employed for their comfort; but one number on the daily program of events never missed of an audience, if the weather permitted the presence of passengers on deck. This was the boat drill, which, on the *Mirrow,* was a most interesting performance.

Following the touching of the great steamship at Campeache, good weather prevailed, and she bore off to round the square-nosed peninsula of Yucatan. Everybody was on deck during the hours of daylight, for the sea was as smooth as a millpond, and the seats under the awnings and in the shadow of the deck houses were well patronized.

No land was in view, for the *Mirrow* took a long turn into the Gulf in weathering the peninsula. The coast hereabout is dangerous in the extreme.

The steamship was making her fifteen knots, cleaving a sea as calm as one could wish, and tinted with as deep a blue as that of the sky overhead. It was hard now to imagine the two fierce squalls which smote the vessel before she touched Campeache.

At about noon the passengers gathered in readiness to view the boat drill. Yusuf, the boatswain, shuffled along from the forecastle, took a prominent position, and put the pipe to his lips. This was his opportunity for showing the "white folks" his authority. He knew his tribesmen were eagerly waiting the signal to dash on deck and bound into the boats ready for the word: "Lower away!"

Old Yusuf's breast swelled. In another breath the shrill note of the pipe would have pierced the ears of every man on three decks, when suddenly a lithe, brown-skinned sailor, with horribly tattooed arms and big gold rings in his ears, appeared from forward and ran to the boatswain's side.

An instant's chatter in Cingalese, and Yusuf dropped his pipe, turning with the litheness of a tiger to spring up the steps to the quarter, where the captain stood with several of his staff, the daily altitude of the sun having just been taken.

Bruce was near enough to overhear the commander of the *Mirrow* speak to the boatswain, whose yellow face wrinkled like a monkey's with fright. "Whatee make want, Yusuf?"

The boatswain pointed wildly forward, chattering so fast that nobody but a master of Pidgin-English—or that brand used aboard a coolie ship, which is much more simple than that spoken by the merchants of Hongkong and Canton—could have understood what he said. The captain's ruddy face grew suddenly grave. He raised his hand in command, and the flow of broken English ceased.

"Me sabee good. Me give lakee," he said, waving the Malay down from the quarter.

His gaze, and that of all about him, were turned forward. Bruce, alive to the fact that something momentous was afoot, sprang up, too.

There, from the combings of the forward hatch, he beheld a thin spiral of smoke curling upward. It was gone in an instant, but the suggestion of peril smote him like a physical blow.

He dropped back into his seat and strove to control himself. He felt as one might when suddenly warned of danger in the midst of a great assemblage—when the first expression of fear would be the germ of a panic. He suspected what threatened on the instant.

The young man glanced about him at the unsuspicious passengers. There was Mac, stretching his long length in a deck chair, calmly unconscious of anything out of the ordinary. Joplin was trotting up and down alone, his hands behind him, his pudgy, rosy face unclouded by any trouble.

Even Miss Gratton was in sight; and her presence sharpened Bruce Hanson's apprehension. Despite the fact that he had failed to become acquainted with the young girl, she still interested him deeply. If this thing which startled the officers of the *Mirrow* was really of

moment, what would become of her—and of the other helpless women and children on the passenger list?

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLOATING VOLCANO.

Hanson turned his attention to the group on the bridge again. He heard Captain Merrithew say to his chief officer: "Mr. Evans, pass the word that this will be turned into a fire drill, and that it will take place in the bows of her. Tell the purser to stay with the passengers. Start men forward there to lift the forward hatch on the upper deck. Lively, now!"

"Lively's the word, sir," repeated the chief officer, and a minute later the crew were running about, obeying the volleyed orders, in a manner which indicated imperative haste.

Thin and consumptive as the puff of smoke had seemed, it suggested a peril most dreaded at sea—a conflagration in the hold—and the men knew it. How far down this fire might be there was no way of telling until the hatches were lifted.

Below the hatch which had been ordered off was the steel compartment of the main deck, formed by the sides of the ship and the bulkheads running athwartships. Below the main was the orlop deck, and beneath that the lower hold. The moment the forward hatch in the upper deck was raised, one of the younger officers dropped into the cavity, carrying the pump line with him. The clank of the pumps already jarred the deck, and the passengers gathered with renewed interest to view this decidedly novel "drill."

The smoke which rose through the open hatchway astonished them; but it made the supposed practice work seem more realistic. The smoke was quite heavy at first on the main deck, and a peculiarly stifling odor rose with it into the outer air, where it was quickly dissipated.

Soon the main deck was almost freed of this fog, and, finding no fire, the officer with the pump line called down a gang of the brown-skinned Malays to remove the hatch between that and the orlop deck.

There was not much cargo stowed on the main deck, nor was it of a particularly combustible nature, so the officer looked for no added peril from the opening of this second hatch. Even if the flames shot forth, they would do little damage before several streams of water could be brought to bear upon them. With an encouraging shout to the men, he aimed the nozzle of his pipe at the hatchway as the cover was torn off.

The black smoke shot upward in a thick column, and with it came fumes which overpowered half a dozen men in a most surprising manner, dropping them to the deck like logs. There was a small panic among the Malays then, and the officer had hard work to drive them back to the rescue of their fallen comrades.

Finally the unconscious members of the crew were dragged to the portholes for air, and Dr. Sigsby, the *Mirrow's* surgeon, came down to attend them. The passengers failed to see this, however, but they beheld with astonishment first, then with no little fear, the increased volume of smoke rolling up from below decks.

Black and thick it came, and the main deck was quickly made untenable. Sigsby ordered everybody out of the compartment, and for several moments matters were at a standstill. Even Captain Merrithew seemed to lose his head.

"Don't send your men down into those fumes," the surgeon told him. "If you do, you'll have their death upon your conscience. That's chlorine gas; it's deadly poison!"

The commander of the *Mirrow* called for the cargo lists and went over them himself to learn what might be the cause of the fire and the deadly gas which accompanied it. Added to the peril of fire—which in itself was sufficient to stampede the superstitious crew—was this mysterious vapor, and the Malays hung back from the mouth of this pit which vomited such a devil's fog.

Several streams of water were poured through the main deck compartment into the uncovered hatchway giving entrance to the orlop deck. On this deck were bales of wool and dry goods. The dense smoke might easily come from this merchandise, but chlorine gas could not originate in them. Of this Bruce Hanson, being a bit of a chemist, was sure.

He stood near enough to hear the cargo lists read out by the excited captain. The purser had driven the other passengers well aft, but Bruce had been overlooked, and he listened, deeply interested.

In the lower hold were hogsheads of soda and other hogsheads of bleaching powder, while in the center of this compartment, fifty feet below the upper deck, was a crate of fine pottery packed in straw.

"That fire's in the dry goods; that is what makes the smoke," declared Captain Merrithew. "Nothing in that lower hold would give out a smoke like this. We must break out the cargo on the orlop deck. Have Yusuf pipe all hands, Mr. Evans."

But Bruce Hanson had quickly figured out a different explanation of the danger than this. Those dry goods and bales of wool might be afire, but their burning would not generate the chlorine gas.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the young man said, tugging at the commander's sleeve. "I believe the fire must be lower down than those bales of dry goods."

Merrithew turned upon him with a face like a thundercloud. "What the devil are you doing here, sir?" he demanded. "Get off of this quarter-deck. Aren't you a passenger?"

"I am, sir. Paid my passage," replied Hanson, briskly.

"Get down where you belong, then!" pursued the commander of the *Mirrow*, roughly enough. "I'm not in the habit of having lubbers like you around underfoot. Get out, I say!"

"A lubber like me may know something that will help you in your present difficulty," said Hanson, keeping his temper admirably. "I do not mean to be officious——"

"Mr. Evans!" roared Merrithew. "Take this fellow down, will you?"

"You confounded, pig-headed ass!" ejaculated the American, at length, losing his temper. "It takes a cuckoo of an Englishman to do a thing like this. I tell you you're entirely wrong about this fire. It's deeper down than the orlop deck. It's in the hold."

Evans hesitated, with his hand upon the young man's shoulder. But Captain Merrithew was in no mood to listen to reason. "Down with him!" he roared again.

"Now, I warn you!" sputtered Bruce, as he was forced to the stairway. "You have refused to listen, and I'll report the matter to the owners. By Jove! I'll tell you, anyway.

"Dr. Sigsby says it's chlorine gas that is escaping with the smoke from the hold. The fire has started in the lower hold, I'll bet my last cent!

"Like enough the packing straw around that crockery, ignited by spontaneous combustion; mebbe it's been smoldering for days. The red heat generated there has caused a fusion of the soda ash and bleaching powder in the hogsheads. That's it, I tell you!"

All the time Evans was forcing him down, and Hanson turned an angry and perspiring face upon the captain. "You numskull! Ask your surgeon if that combination won't form chlorine gas. You might as well open your sea cocks first as last and smother the fire properly; you're risking the lives of your crew and passengers——"

But it was useless to shout longer. Evans had forced him too far away for the captain to hear his abuse.

"It really won't do, sir," the chief officer said, mildly. "Passengers had best mind their own affairs and not trouble Captain Merrithew. He is not an easy man to advise."

"But the fellow's a fool! He's too thick-headed to look into a perfectly sane suggestion," sputtered Hanson. "This steamship is a floating volcano at the present moment. And he can pour all the water down into the orlop

deck that he likes; it won't put out the fire or reach the seat of the stifling gas."

"Maybe not, sir. But Captain Merrithew is in command and we must all obey him."

"Confounded ass!" the young American repeated.

"And I must have your word that you will say nothing to the other passengers which will stir them up against the officers of the ship," declared the first officer, who was a peculiarly even-tempered man. "Otherwise I shall be constrained to put you under guard. A panic at this point would be disastrous."

"Oh, I'll keep my mouth shut, whichever way it goes, till we get ashore. But old Merrithew hasn't heard the last of this. Throwing me off his old quarter-deck!"

Evans smiled quietly. "A quarter-deck is more than a captain's castle," he said. Then there came a call for him. "I have your promise, sir," he added, significantly, as he turned away.

But Bruce Hanson had been right, although he may have gone about impressing his suspicion upon the commander of the *Mirrow* in an unwise manner. The lower compartments forward had been filled with the deadly vapor for some time before the smoke was discovered, and undoubtedly the fire was now ready to burst upward if given a chance.

The situation was sufficient to excuse Captain Merrithew's shortness of temper, if not his lack of perception. He refused to credit the truth of Hanson's remarks, and went ahead upon the supposition that the seat of the fire was on the orlop deck, the hatchway of which was now open.

When the fumes of gas were somewhat cleared out of the main deck compartment, he ordered Chief Officer Evans down there himself with the pipe lines, and volunteers from the crew and petty officers followed. Orders were given to break out the orlop deck cargo as fast as possible.

The passengers were by this time in a state of great fright. The purser's assurances that there was no danger could not convince them. Fortunately there were not more than seventy-five passengers aboard the *Mirrow,* and few of this number were women and children.

Bruce Hanson, driven from the quarter so ignominiously, saw Miss Gratton, with pale but composed features, leading her maid, Burton, below. The millionaire's daughter had evidently a fund of pluck on which to call in this emergency, and Hanson admired her for it.

His own attempt to serve the commander of the *Mirrow* having been met with so decided a snub, he did all that he could to reassure the other passengers. Secretly he believed that there was but one way to save the ship from serious damage from the conflagration. That was to open the cocks and let the sea into that compartment of the forward hold where the seat of the fire was, and so smother it.

"That will stop the chlorine gas and all," he muttered. "And this ass of a captain will monkey around and break out his cargo, and waste time until we shall really all be in danger."

Still the young fellow could not believe that the big steamship was actually threatened with a disastrous fire. He knew how well she was built, and how her steel bulkheads made her almost unsinkable and practically "fireproof."

In addition to Hanson's and the purser's declarations that the fire was of little importance, Chief Officer Evans sent back word that he would soon have the conflagration under subjection; the chlorine gas was the more important danger, and that would soon be cleared from the holds.

But when Bruce happened to see Mr. Evans himself brought up unconscious and carried aft for the surgeon to work over, he knew that all these favorable reports were buncombe. The gas was increasing instead of diminishing.

He knew better than to approach any of the superior officers again, but he went in search of Duff. News of the conflagration had been kept from the Lascars in the stoke hole, for their situation in the bowels of the ship was one of extreme peril, and if they became

panic-stricken, the furnaces would be left unmanned.

Duff was standing guard at the hatch of the fireroom, therefore, and looking mighty grave.

"What did I say to ye about the *Mirrow's* being hoodooed?" he whispered, when Bruce approached. "Go pack yer dunnage, Mr. Hanson. Lucky 'tis a calm sea we have."

"Nonsense, Duff! The ship will never burn with all her steel bulkheads, and that sort o' gear."

"Yah! A fire aboardship is the de'il's own! Steel, nor naught else, can stop it. An' the breath o' this is like that of the Pit itself, I've nae doubt!"

"Well, Duff, you, being a kirkman in good standing, may have more exact knowledge on that point than most of us," grinned Bruce. "I'm not well acquainted with the nature of the fumes that rise from that place; but if it's chlorine gas, then I can tell you what may quench it."

"What's that, sir?" asked the Scot, eagerly.

"As long as your pig-headed chump of an English captain"—Duff grinned—"won't listen to reason and let the sea into his lower hold where the seat of the fire is—I'll stake my oath!—let him turn steam into all the decks forward. Shut down the upper-deck hatch and let the steam soak into the cargo. Unless the fire's gone too far, that may quench it."

"D'ye think so?" demanded Duff, who had some admiration for his young friend's knowledge of things strange and wonderful to his unlearned mind. "Tell the old man that."

"Not I!" cried Bruce, and he related what had already befallen because of his officiousness.

"Eh! but the old man's crazed to refuse advice from anyone. I'll speak to my chief about the steam, Mr. Hanson," and he hurried away.

But Hanson watched him go gloomily. The steam was merely a makeshift. He was sure those sea cocks should be opened.

Then he turned suddenly and saw Gabe, the head oiler, looking at him threateningly from the other side of the engine. When the Mohammedan saw that he was watched he disappeared, but for the first time Hanson had noticed the man's eyes.

"Ugh!" he thought, with a shudder. "They're like a snake's. Gee! I believe the yellow rascal *would* do me an ill turn if he could."

But he held neither Gabe's enmity nor the peril of the conflagration at their true value.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE HEART OF THE FURNACE.

Bruce Hanson's suggestion went up through the proper channels until it reached Captain Merrithew, for the red-tape aboard a big merchant steamship is almost equal to that upon a naval vessel. By this time the officers were at their wits' end, so the idea of turning steam into the compartments was seized upon instantly.

Bruce was too much interested in the fight against the fire to pay attention to those passengers who thronged the cabins and smoking room. Joplin he saw once, and the fat man's face was ash-colored, and his fingers, holding a big black cigar that had gone out, shook like a palsied man's.

"Terrible—terrible, Mr. Hanson!" he stuttered. "I was a fool to take this steamer. If anything happens to Miss Gratton while she is under my care, what will Mr. Stump say to me?"

"He'll be glad of it, according to your own tell," growled Bruce, much disgusted by his exhibition of craven terror. "They've quarreled, haven't they?"

But Joplin was horrified. He evidently believed the Wall Street manipulator a paragon of all the virtues. "You are insulting, Mr. Hanson!" he exclaimed, forgetting his fright momentarily in his indignation.

Miss Gratton herself was not in view. Bruce made inquiries and learned from a stewardess that Miss Gratton's maid had surrendered to a fit of "nerves," and that the young lady was nursing

her in their private suite of cabins. "And a hangel that young lydy is, hif ever I saw one!" declared the stewardess. "She may be toppish, an' hoffish with the rest o' th' passengers, sir; but she's a 'eart in 'er! That Burton ain't no good at hall!"

Bruce agreed that Miss Gratton must be "a hangel," and he marked the lady's suite well. If worst came to worst, the American was pretty sure that Joplin would look after his own precious skin and forget all about Benjamin Gratton's daughter and her maid.

He met MacDowell, however, and found him as interested in the fight, and quite as calm, as he was himself. "Vairy int'resting, Maister Hanson," said the Scot, speaking with exaggerated broadness of accent. "I've computed the loss of the cargo if those compairtments are destroyed. It will mount into the thousands, sir—into the thousands!"

"I'm thinking of the poor devils of sailors. If they're not watched carefully, they'll breathe enough of those fumes to kill 'em. The Malays are fatalists, and they'll go blindly where their boatswain sends them, scared as they are."

"Ye're tender-hearted with the heathen, Mr. Hanson," said MacDowell, with a twinkle in his eye. "I've heard from one of the officers that the little feller in the engine room has it in for you, too."

"I reckon this isn't a time for remembering old scores," Bruce said, shrugging his shoulders. Yet he was smitten again with the thought of the glance Gabe had given him when he was in the engine room. "If I know anything about it, Mac, we're up against a fierce proposition in this fire. They'll never put it out in the world if they don't hasten with that steam."

His suggestion was being carried out with as great dispatch as possible, however. But the officers were, perhaps, too eager to learn how the scheme was working, for, after half an hour, the hatch in the upper deck was taken off again.

The four men who removed it fell as though shot. The smoke rushed forth, yellow and deadly. The choking fumes spread about the upper deck, which, although open to the air, was made dangerous for even the rescue party that ran in to bear away the fallen men.

But the yellow vapor thinned quickly, floating away to windward like smoke from a sulphur smudge, and after a time Chief Officer Evans dared descend to the main deck, returning in five minutes, but without assistance, to report. "The fire cannot be in the orlop compartment, sir," he said to Captain Merrithew, respectfully. "I am afraid, as that young Mr. Hanson said, it must be in the stuff in the lower hold."

That was an unfortunate statement for him to have made. Merrithew, as Hanson said, was a Briton with all a true Briton's obstinacy. His naturally ruddy face blazed like a setting sun. "Mr. Evans," he bawled, "when I want you, or any confounded Yankee, to tell me what to believe, and what not to believe, I'll be a good deal older man than I am now. You break out that cargo in the orlop, and have no words about it!"

"But the gas is gathering again, sir. I could scarcely breathe on the main deck just now. We are risking the men's lives."

"You do as I tell you, sir!" commanded Merrithew. "Gas, indeed! They're a healthy crew if they can't stand a bit of a stink—the rats!"

The surgeon was not by to hear this. What Captain Merrithew called "a bit of a stink" was quite as deadly a composition as is known to chemistry.

"You break out those bales of dry goods and the wool, and work down so as to open that hatch into the hold, if you like," the commander added. "But you'll find the fire in the orlop, I'll bet my soul!"

His orders were obeyed; but little seemed to have been accomplished when night fell. All the afternoon, while the *Mirrow* sped through the quiet sea, her crew fought the peril. The majority of the passengers were soothed

into better humor. A long-threatened danger comes to be ignored, anyway, and the steamship seemed to make her course without regard to the fire eating at her vitals. Bruce Hanson, however, who watched the fight, was confident that no real advance was being made against the smoldering conflagration.

"The sea cocks should be opened. Every moment that fire gains strength," he declared to MacDowell. "The open hatches give free vent to the escaping gas, of course, and the men are no longer overcome; but by and by the flames will burst out unexpectedly, and with such power that the crew will have difficulty in controlling them."

Mac grinned. "Why don't you petition the crew to put you at the head of affairs? Start a mutiny."

"It might save all our lives if something should happen to Merrithew, so that Evans could have full swing."

Perhaps some of the subordinate officers of the steamship thought this as well. But they doggedly obeyed orders, and, with the fatalist crew, kept up the fight. Bales and cases were grappled for through the hatchway in the main deck and hoisted out into that compartment. A man could work in the orlop but a few minutes at a time, and it was past midnight when any space about the hatchway into the lower hold was cleared.

Up to this time Captain Merrithew had refused to believe the seat of the fire below the orlop deck. Chemistry meant nothing to him; he snorted at the idea of spontaneous combustion, and continued to call the chlorine gas "a stink" up to the last moment. To his mind, opening the sea cocks in the forward hold was a last desperate resort, and he shrank from doing it.

It was proven now, even to his satisfaction, that the source of the smoke and fumes which had made half the sailors ill was in the lowest depths of the ship. The men could not approach this hatch, now that it was uncovered. Merrithew ordered the water let into the forward hold.

But having waited so long before doing this, the fire was fairly raging there. The iron plates of the orlop deck were too hot for a man to stand upon. The crew were forced to retreat to the upper deck, where, had it not been for the control over them held by Yusuf, they would have stampeded for the boats.

As the water in the compartment rose, the smoke and gas increased, the yellow vapor mounting through the upper hatchway, and, in the still night, ascending in a clearly defined pillar to the mastheads. Although the passengers were mainly kept below, Hanson and MacDowell got out through the smoking cabin, and stood at the rail watching this phenomenon.

Suddenly a dull explosion sounded in their ears. It came from far below the deck on which they stood, and shook the steamship as though she had rubbed her keel along a rib of rock.

"Something's happened in the boiler room!" exclaimed MacDowell, removing his pipe, and speaking, for him, excitedly.

"No," Bruce said. "I've been expecting it. I'm afraid we're to be treated to a more dangerous exhibition. The fastenings of that lower hatch have given way——"

As he spoke, the color of the rising smoke cloud changed to black, in which red streaks began to play. Hanson's calmness quickly disappeared.

"Great heavens!" he murmured. "The flames have actually broken out. Mac, the ship is doomed!"

"She can't burn," said the Scot, in disbelief. "She's 'most all iron."

"I tell you she's as good as gone now. Come along! There's work for us to do below—or will be in short order."

He started for the main saloon, and his friend followed unquestioningly. Most of the passengers had retired, being assured by the purser, under Captain Merrithew's instructions, that there was no real danger, and that the course of the *Mirrow* was toward the land, anyway. It had been better were the last statement true.

Merrithew was by no means a reck-

less navigator, but he had held the peril too cheaply. Now that it was too late he headed the volunteers who strove to descend and shut the main-deck hatch, thus confining the fire to the two lower compartments. He went to his death—Hanson did not know this until later; but the doughty old British commander was the only man not driven back by the flames which soon issued from the hatchway in the upper deck and mounted to the rigging. His body was incinerated on the main deck, from which he could not be rescued.

Awakened by the pounding of the stewards on their doors, the half-dressed passengers poured forth into the saloons. The electric lights had been turned on all over the ship; the purser and his assistants were directing the passengers what to do, and seeking to allay their fears, when Hanson and MacDowell came down from the upper deck. The young men came below too early to see a mob of crazy Malays, mechanics, coal passers and the riffraff of steerage and fo'castle stampede for the boats. The flames were already leaping from the upper deck, and to fight them with the puny streams from the pump lines was a waste of time. Captain Merrithew's horrible death rattled even the chief officer, and bedlam reigned on deck as well as in the main saloon.

Dawn was approaching, and with it came a rising wind that spurred the flames, now feeding on the cargo in the forward orlop and main-deck compartments. The old *Mirrow* was down by the head because of the water let into her hold through the sea cocks, and now a nasty ripple on the surface of the sea added to the terror of the scene. The crew realized that the element eating its way into the very heart of the ship threatened a danger as grave as collision with the waterspout would have offered several days before.

Word of the outbreak of the fire had been passed to the Lascars below by their countrymen, and more than half of them stampeded; fatalists as they were, they could not remain steady under threat of incineration in the bowels of the ship. The others Duff held to their tasks at the point of his revolver; for if the furnaces were not fed the *Mirrow* would soon be wallowing in the sea, with no headway.

Boat after boat was launched by the scrambling crew—Chinese help, under stewards, machinists and "landsmen" in general—and for a time all system was lost. Then Mr. Evans managed to get control of the stampeded ship's company, and the passengers were driven up in groups and placed in the remaining boats as fast as possible. Several life rafts which had been lashed to the deck forward were cut off by the leaping flames, now driving aft before the gale.

The earlier boats having been improperly manned and not systematically filled, made the problem of stowing the passengers in the later craft one of extreme difficulty. All the practice learned at boat drill was of no service now. Old Yusuf had gone mad with the rest of his tribesmen, and Evans saw that only the whites aboard were to be depended upon for coolness and promptness in obeying orders.

Below, it was Surgeon Sigsby and the purser who kept some semblance of order among the terrified passengers. Of these, perhaps little Joplin was the most to be pitied. His rotund body could not shrink; but his face was gray and his cheeks had actually lost their plumpness in a night.

"My God, Mr. Hanson!" he cried, into that young man's ear, as a group of passengers were herded on the main deck in readiness for a boat, if the boat could be found. "What will become of us? What will Mr. Stump say to me if his niece is lost—what will he say?"

Bruce and MacDowell had done what they could to help the women—and some of the men, too—with the life preservers. But the American had attached himself to Joplin's party. Miss Gratton seemed quite collected, although she only spoke to soothe her frightened maid, who crouched upon the floor, clinging to the young girl's hand as though that firm grip was her one hold upon hope.

It could not honestly be said that Bruce Hanson was unafraid. Only a fool could have faced the threatening danger without fear. But he was cool, and when he spoke to Mac his voice was without a tremor.

"You've got nothing to trouble you, Mac, so I'll depend upon you to see after Miss Gratton's maid, if anything happens."

"You can count on me, Maister Hanson," declared the Scot. "There should be boats enough——"

His further words were drowned by an explosion which shook the ship from upper deck to keel. One of the forward bulkheads had blown in and, like a pack of hungry hounds suddenly unleashed, the flames rushed aft.

"Remain where you are!" shrieked Bruce, above the general confusion. He knew that in the sudden rush of the stampeded passengers and guards there was more danger to be apprehended for the moment than from the fire itself. He seized the maid, who would have broken away from Miss Gratton, and passed her, struggling and screaming, to the Scot.

"Look out for her, Mac. This way, Joplin"—for the millionaire's agent, wild-eyed and driveling in his terror, had picked himself up from the deck where the shock of the explosion had thrown him, and was running blindly into the wall of smoke and flame, which was pouring down the companionway before them.

In a moment—almost in the passing of a breath—the little party of five had been left in this retired corner. Shrieks rose from behind the cloud of flame-lit smoke which poured into the cabin. They were shut off from immediate exit to the outer air, and, seizing Miss Gratton firmly by the arm, Bruce led the retreat.

They crossed the apartment, Bruce hoping to find escape by the other stairway. But like a pack of ravening wolves the flames leaped into the open ports, licking up the woodwork and cushions, and puffing into their faces stifling smoke which threatened their lives by suffocation even before the fire itself could accomplish its deadly work.

Thus, with the fire raging on both sides of the saloon and the stairways filled with smoke and the sound of crackling flames, but one way of escape seemed open. Behind was a passage leading forward—toward the seat of the fire, perhaps, but apparently almost free of smoke. "This way, this way!" Bruce shouted, and, fairly catching the millionaire's daughter in his arms, he plunged into this passage, while Mac followed, dragging the maid with him.

"What will I do? My God! what will I do?" shrieked Joplin, behind them.

"Come on, if ye don't want to be roasted like the pig ye are!" said Mac, over his shoulder, and so, with Hanson ahead with his charge, and poor little Joplin trailing behind like a whipped puppy, they ran into the very heart of the furnace.

TO BE CONTINUED.

ANNABEL'S WAGER

By Rafael Sabatini

This is a sparkling tale of Cavalier and Roundhead days, when men wore picturesque garments and the sword was mightier than the pen. As this story demonstrates, however, human nature was very much the same then as now

I ONCE knew a man who, being under sentence of death, was fretted, the night before they hanged him, at having taken cold —which may serve as an instance of how it is not so much the greater of foreshadowed ills that harasses us as the more imminent. To this construction of the human mind I may set it down that, lying besieged in Penhilgon Castle, with the assurance that should we fall into the hands of the Roundheads that were besetting us, there was an overwhelming likelihood of a short shrift in payment for our obstinate resistance, I was a thousand times more plagued and vexed by the coldness of Sir Andrew Penhilgon's daughter than by any contemplation of what might befall did his majesty's move from Oxford fail to take place in time to save us.

You may say that I was a fool not to discern that a maid could hardly opine the season one for dalliance; but defer your judgment until you shall have learned what else I have to tell.

A time there had been when it had seemed that my suit with Annabel was like to prosper, and this it had done but for the coming to Penhilgon of Master Steele—a man as out of place in that stern garrison as a shaveling monk in a regiment of cavalry. He was a pretty fellow—thus much justice will I do his looks—but it would seem that nature jested in that he had been born a man. At heart, I'll swear, he was a woman. He had a woman's daintiness of speech, a woman's mincing ways of gesture; like a woman, he inclined to the pursuit of flowers and verses, and he was stirred by all a woman's gentle horror of war and bloodshed. He started did a musket crack, and the flash of a drawn sword would make him blench and shudder, while the sight of blood turned him as squeamish as the sight of virtue might old Satan.

It was overstrange how Annabel, the child of a warlike race, should come to suffer the attentions of this feeble creature, scented like a nosegay and beribboned like a church in time of victory. Yet this she did; and while I went about my duties at the castle in somber, jealous moodiness, and Sir James scowled damnably upon the business, Master Steele sunned himself in her smiles, walked with her in the quadrangle or upon the ramparts, sat with her at the spinet, and, in short, was never from her side. That he was named Steele was but another irony. Had I had the naming of him I had called him Water.

Enough was Sir James put about by the siege, and I dared not intrude my grievance upon the anxiety wherewith already he was overburdened. Moreover, for all that he disliked good Master Steele, yet were his views less rancorous than mine, for, after all, he was but Annabel's father; and a father is oft wont to be less troubled by his daughter's choice of a lover than are other men.

I stood one night upon the ramparts

to the north, looking down upon the lights gleaming in the Parliamentarian lines, and wondering how soon the king would come. There was a bloody bandage about my head, for there had been sharp work that day, and, though we had repulsed the enemy effectively for the time, yet the victory had been dearly bought in lives and limbs. Annabel approached me softly in the dark, and her voice was tender as a caress.

"My poor Jocelyn, does your head hurt?"

I started round, and, my mood being boorish and surly with jealousy, "'Tis naught," said I. "The graze of a pike. A little more, and it had made an end of me; yet I know gentler hands that deal wounds less bloody but more hurtful."

"'Tis perhaps that you wound yourself upon the weapons of those hands."

"Mistress," I answered, "I have not a poet's mind to grasp these nice distinctions. Master Steele," I went on, with my back turned, "I pray you make clear to me her meaning."

"To whom are you speaking?" she asked. "Master Steele is not here."

"Is he not?" I cried, in feigned surprise, and turning as if to assure myself of his absence. "Why, what hath chanced that he is not beside you? And just as I so needed him! Lackaday!"

"Jealousy lends you a poor wit," said she, "and outrivals nature in making you a dullard."

"Madam," said I, with a great dignity, "a wounded head is a not overuseful thing to think with."

She came a step nearer at that, but ere she could speak there was a heavy tread behind us, and Sir Andrew's voice.

"Is it not strange, Jocelyn," said the knight, "with what insistence they press us here on the northern side?"

"I had, indeed, remarked it," I replied. "Our weakness in this quarter cannot be apparent to them from without, yet, by a singular ill-chance, each attack has been directed against it."

"Ay," he growled, sourly, "it would almost seem as if they had information from within."

"Impossible," I answered, quickly.

"So you say, yet I cannot repress the suspicion. There is one here of whom we know but little save that he fled to us for shelter."

"Monstrous!" cried Annabel, divining of whom he spoke.

He laughed contemptuously, and looked to me for an answer.

I hesitated for a moment. The rivalry that lay between Steele and me made me pause before uttering what otherwise I had spoken boldly. Yet in the end, deeming the season other than one for scruples, and realizing how much foundation there haply was for Sir Andrew's suspicion, "It might not be ill," I hazarded, "to apply some test."

"'Tis what I had thought," he agreed, whereupon Annabel cried "Monstrous!" again; then, turning to me, "'Tis cowardly in you!" she exclaimed. "Master Steele is an honorable gentleman, and I would as soon suspect you of being the traitor."

I smiled wistfully, and held up my left hand, from which the two middle fingers had been lopped by a Puritan sword some months ago.

"'Odds' life, Annabel," I answered, "I wear the signs of *my* loyalty for all to read."

"And so does he, for those that have discerning eyes. He is aglow with loyalty. Could you but see the verses he has written on the king— —"

"Bah!" snarled Sir Andrew, rudely interrupting her.

"Verses are but words," said I, "and words need not express our true sentiments. Of what value, for instance, is a liar's word?"

"You dub him liar now!" she cried, with a woman's facility for subverting a man's meaning. "I vow 'tis very noble of you!"

Whereupon, seeing how her mood had grown of that quality in which the merest word offends, I held my peace.

But coming later to ponder what Sir Andrew had said—and aided, maybe, in some unconscious way by my dislike for Steele—I grew more and more mistrustful of the youth; to such a degree at last that, seeking Sir Andrew

on the morrow. I counseled that some measure of test be applied.

"Do what you will," said he. "I mislike the coxcomb, with his oily, insidious ways; and if you do no more than prove him a craven, and cure Annabel of her unaccountable kindness for him, 'twill be something."

He set his hand on my shoulder, and, letting his eyes meet mine, he sighed.

"Before he came to us it seemed that Annabel was growing fond of you, Jocelyn." Then, bracing himself: "Make your experiment, lad. Put him to some test; and may Heaven send you success, and prove him a rogue!"

With that encouragement I set to work. And, my plans being laid, I went in quest of good Master Steele that evening. I found him in one of the rooms overlooking the courtyard. He sat with Annabel, citing lines—whose virtues he was extolling—from the works of one Thomas Campion. Annabel, who reclined in a great chair, listened with great show of attention.

"Master Steele," said I, as politely as might be.

"Your servant, sir," said he, in a tone that implied the very contrary; then added that anon he would give me his attention. I told him, with a brevity that held more peremptoriness than wit, that my business could not wait, for it was desired that within an hour, as soon as it grew dark, he should leave the castle. Before I had got further, Annabel was on her feet, and eying me with some show of anger.

"This is your doing, Jocelyn!" she exclaimed, hotly.

"In a measure it may be; yet things are not as you think. There is no question of Master Steele's dismissal. On the contrary, I come from Sir Andrew to afford him an opportunity of very signally distinguishing himself, if he is minded to undertake the task I shall propose."

He was toying stupidly with a lock of his hair, his jaw fallen, and his cheeks, methought, a little paler than their wont.

"Master Steele," I resumed, seeing that he had no word to offer, "as you may in a measure realize, our circumstances here are growing sorely straitened, and we shall not be able to resist the crop-ears much longer. We have just had news that Rupert is at Stafford; and we require a messenger who, escaping the vigilance of the Puritans, will make his way to the prince, and bring him with all dispatch to our assistance. It is Sir Andrew's wish that you undertake this."

"But why send Master Steele?" cried Annabel. "He is not a soldier."

"Of that," I answered, dryly, "I was dimly aware. But for this work a messenger is needed, not a soldier."

Steele stood before me in a very stricken attitude; and from the fact that he betrayed no alacrity to be about the business, I already began to think that we had misjudged him; for, were he a spy, what easier than, upon leaving us, to join the Roundheads, and tell them of our plight, leaving the message to Rupert undelivered?

"But—but," he stammered, taken aback, "I am all unversed in these affairs. Were it not better, Master Varley, to employ one of the men of the garrison?"

"We can ill afford a single man," I answered; "though, even if we could, matters would be no better. We require some one who will carry a message by word of mouth, and not by letter; else, did our messenger fall into Puritan hands, our condition would be discovered. We require a gentleman who will permit himself to be hanged ere he will betray us; and we can think of no likelier person than yourself."

'Swounds! How those reassuring words of mine froze him with their foreshadowing of violence! Pale as the dead, and with eyes that would not meet my glance, he stood and spake no word—he whose tongue we knew for as glib and pert as that of a hostelry wench. Annabel was watching him; and as moments passed and still he uttered never a syllable, a frown of displeasure fell between her fine eyes.

"You will go, of course, Master Steele?" said she, at last.

"Why — why, yes," he faltered,

ashamed, at least, of the pusillanimity he was manifesting. "Since it is required of me, I'll go. You say that I am to set out in an hour?"

"As soon as it is dark," I answered.

Under pretense of making ready he left us upon the instant; and I never doubted but that it was shame that drove him to hide his palsied condition from Annabel's eyes.

Her wrath boiled up as he departed, and like a fury—the sweetest, loveliest, daintiest fury that ever graced the realms of Pluto—she turned upon me.

"I read your motive, Master Jocelyn," quoth she, indignantly, "as plainly as though you had told me of it!"

"My motive, madam," said I, testily, "is to get a message to Rupert by means of Master Steele."

"Not so," she cried. "You sought but to prove him a coward in my eyes."

"And have I failed?"

"Most signally. For you see that he is prepared to go."

"He could be no less, in your presence, if he would not be branded a craven by you."

"You do him wrong," she cried, with loyal heat, "as you yourself shall confess. You think, because he is not a bloodthirsty swaggerer of your own kidney, that he has no valor; because he prefers to smell of musk rather than to reek of leather, you account him a milksop. But already has he proven you wrong, for you see that he goes."

"Ay," I replied, unguardedly. "But he shall prove me right ere the business is concluded."

"You confess it, then?" she cried, in triumph.

I bit my lip, and swore softly to myself.

"Why, yes. It seems I do."

She measured me with her eyes for a moment, and a curious smile sat on her lips.

"Jocelyn," said she, at last, "have you a mind to make a wager with me touching this?"

"A wager? I'll wager all I am possessed of. What do you lay against it?"

She was silent for a spell, and, turning half from me, she looked through the open window into the gathering dusk. Then: "You have oft wooed me, Jocelyn," she murmured, "have you not?"

"Why, yes; and until this milksop appeared it seemed I did not do so quite in vain."

"And are you still of the same mind concerning me?" she asked.

The throb of my pulses quickened. I took an eager, yet hesitant, step in her direction, for with my sudden hopes were blended fears and doubt of her.

"Annabel!" I cried. But she waved me back, growing of a sudden very chill, and her answer fell calm and deliberate:

"So sure am I of Master Steele's high spirit, Jocelyn, that I am willing to wager myself against whatever you may incline to lay as of equal value that his courage will be proof against any test that you may apply to it!"

"Done!" I cried, hotly. "By my soul, I have naught of equal value, yet all I have I'll stake."

"You will be a poor man to-morrow, Jocelyn," she laughed.

"Mayhap," I answered, turning to depart in quest of Master Steele, "and, mayhap, a passing rich one."

From Sir Andrew himself did Steele receive his parting injunctions, and anon we saw him leave the castle by the postern gate, despite his fears and tremors, and vanish into the darkness of the lowering night.

Now, the news that I had said we had of Rupert had been brought us by one Richard Cartwright—a nephew of Sir Andrew's—who had ridden from Stafford to reassure us with word that the prince was moving to our relief, and should reach Penhilgon on the morrow. Since this Cartwright was unknown to Steele, I intrusted to him the leading part in the comedy that was about to be enacted, giving him for companions a half-dozen men taken from the stables, and likewise unknown to our coxcomb. We had tricked the men out in plain cuirasses and steel pots, over scarlet coats, to give them the air of soldiers of the commonwealth.

And these knaves, having left the castle in advance of Master Steele, brought him back within a half hour of his departure, bound and blindfolded. They carried him to one of the lower rooms of the castle, which we had prepared with furnitures of Puritanical severity, and where, with more troopers of Parliamentarian aspect, Sir Andrew and I, in cloaks and steeple hats, awaited him. To the uncertain light and our shadowing headgear we trusted to go unrecognized; and, the better to insure this, we stood not forward, but mingled in the crowd of men-at-arms. Annabel, too, was there by her own desire, but well in the background and the shadows, and wearing also a broad-brimmed hat and a long cloak.

We had strewn the place with accouterments; and at a littered table Dick Cartwright—looking as sour and solemn a Puritan as ever discoursed through his nose—took his seat, and ordered the bandage to be taken from the prisoner's eyes.

"Thy name, fellow?" Cartwright arraigned him, harshly.

"Roland Steele, sir," faltered the poet.

"Art well named, you that come stealing here in the night like a devouring lion bearing down upon the fold of Israel. Confess, art a spy sent out by that blasphemous, drunken, swaggering knight of hell, Sir Andrew Penhilgon—is't not so?" he roared.

"He's an eloquent man, on my soul," grunted Sir Andrew, at my elbow.

As for the miserable Master Steele, who had more the look of a mouse than a lion, he fell to trembling very violently, and his eyes were open wide in affright.

"You are in error, sir," he cried. "By my every hope of Heaven, I swear I am no spy!"

"Are you not from the ogre's castle?"

"From Penhilgon? Yes, sir. But—but—I am a servant there, and——"

"A servant, thou, and in those garments?" bellowed Cartwright, the veins of his forehead swelling with the rage he simulated. "Liar, dost think to catch me with such a falsehood? Go capture an eagle with bird lime! 'Twill prove easier."

"You see," whispered Annabel, "that he is no Parliamentarian spy, else had he made himself known to them."

"I confess I had realized thus much," I answered. "Yet your wager with me touches his mettle rather than his loyalty. They are about to apply the test."

Already Cartwright was speaking. With much mention of the Lord of Hosts, and here and there a proverb interlarded, he was giving Steele the reassuring news that he was to be hanged at once.

"Take him away," he ended, with a wave of the hand, "and get it over speedily."

Then a wild, blood-curdling shriek rang through the apartment, and the coxcomb had fallen on his knees, and was mumbling an incoherent prayer for mercy, swearing with great readiness of oaths that he was no spy.

"Take him away!" Cartwright repeated, more peremptorily; and a couple of men advanced and laid rough hands upon him.

"Spare me, my masters!" he shrieked. "I'll buy my life from you. I'll buy it with information that may be of value to you."

Cartwright raised his hand.

"Stay," he commanded, and the men fell back from the prisoner. "Now, sir, you grow more reasonable. What information have you? Come, sir."

"First promise me," said Steele, "that I shall go free if I tell you all I know."

"If you do that, and answer faithfully such further questions as I may put you, you shall go free," Cartwright promised.

Having received that assurance, Master Steele recounted how hard pressed we were, and so at the end of our tether that he was on his way to Stafford to urge Prince Rupert to hasten to our relief. He assured Cartwright that, did he press the castle without delay, it must fall, adding that on the northern side lay our weakness.

"The dastard!" Annabel breathed, fiercely, in my ear.

"Wait," said I. "It is not ended yet. He is to drink the cup of Judas to the dregs."

"Before I release you," said Cartwright to the prisoner, "there is a service of incalculable value you can render us, and which will satisfy me of your good intentions. You say that you left Penhilgon Castle by the postern gate. Could you re-enter it by the same means?"

"Assuredly. If I make myself known to them they will readmit me."

He was speaking more calmly, now that the shadow of impending doom was lightening.

"You shall do so, then, and we will go with you. You shall return to the postern, and you shall announce that you have information of value for that ruffianly Sir Andrew's ear—news of importance to that godless, bottle-emptying Amalekite."

"His stock of epithets is passing vast," snorted Sir Andrew.

"They will open for you," pursued Cartwright, "and as they do so we will rush their gates. Thus shall the chosen ones of the Lord triumph over these Babylonians. You agree to this?" he demanded, sharply.

Steele bowed his head in silence.

"Go, then," said the pseudo-Roundhead, rising. But, as the troopers made shift to lead him out, "Stay!" he commanded. "It were best to blindfold him. Once a traitor always a traitor; and should he by any chance escape us, it will be best he shall have seen naught that he may anon betray."

I was with them at the postern when, presently, after having borne him three times round the castle, we halted at the little gate, and the bandage was again removed from his eyes.

"'Tis here, is it not?" whispered Cartwright.

He peered about him in the gloom.

"Yes," he answered, softly. "It is here." And, urged by Cartwright, who was on his right, he stepped up to the gate and knocked noisily. I myself was close upon his other side, confident that in the dark, and my face all hidden by my Puritan hat, he would not know me.

He was hailed from within, and in reply he called upon them to open.

"Who are you?" demanded the sentry, and, as he seemed to hesitate, I gripped him suddenly by the arm to urge him.

He shuddered in my grasp; for a second he faltered; then, to our ineffable amazement, "Let Sir Andrew look to his gates!" he cried, in a loud voice. "The enemy is here! God save his majesty!"

That said, he stood in an attitude of fearsome expectancy, as well he might; for had we been the Roundheads we represented ourselves, a dozen sword thrusts had laid him stark at once.

For a moment the surprise of it had robbed me of speech. When at last I recovered, I did a thing in which I take pride to this day. I clapped him on the shoulder, and, "Bravely spoken, Master Steele," quoth I, warmly. "I crave your pardon for the wrong that I have done you in holding you a coward, and submitting you to this test."

And then the door of the postern swung open, and lanterns gleamed within, disclosing—among the men-at-arms assembled there—Sir Andrew and Annabel waiting us. On our shoulders we bore him into the castle, acclaiming him a hero as we went; and that same night a banquet was held at Penhilgon, whereat he sat in the place of honor, 'twixt Sir Andrew and Annabel, flushed with victory, and acknowledging with smiles the toasts that again and again were drunk in his honor and to his heroism. Annabel sat beside him, smiling and treating him with a kindness perchance the greater because she sought to make amends for the moment's doubt that she, too, had entertained. On every hand was laughter, mirth and song, for wine flowed overfreely, until the only glum countenance at that jovial board was mine. For what manner of wager had I not lost? And how much had I not stood to win?

At last, toward midnight, the com-

pany rose, and the men sought their beds, the greater part of them lurching uncertain 'neath their load of wine. I was going by way of the southern rampart to my own apartments when suddenly I came upon our hero giving Annabel "good-night." I was in too somber a mood to desire aught but to escape unobserved, and so I flattened myself in the angle of a buttress, waiting for them to leave me a clear way to depart. But as it chanced they turned and came in my direction, so that I was forced to overhear what passed. Steele's loud voice and the thickness of his utterance placed his condition beyond doubt.

"It may be a goodly thing to have thews and sinews and a knowledge of arms," he was boasting, "but meseems I've proven it a greater thing to have a generous share of mother-wit and a quick brain."

"How so?" she asked.

"Why, 'slife," he laughed, with a hiccough, "when that jealous dog Jocelyn Varley gripped my arm at the postern, a slow-reasoning, dull-witted clod would have profited nothing. But on the instant I knew the touch of that maimed stump of his, and detected the two missing middle fingers. I tell you, sweet Annabel——"

"More than enough have you already told me!" she broke in, with a fierceness of which even I hardly thought her capable—and Heaven knows I had tasted the edge of her temper more than once. "You craven, you cheat, you hound!" she cried. "And you sat at table and let them make a hero of you! Why, you——"

"Nay, nay! I vow I'll——" he began, all of a sudden all subdued, and awake to the indiscretion he had committed.

"I vow you'll leave Penhilgon Castle at daybreak," she cried, firmly. "Else will I tell them what you are; and you may come to know the sting of a rope-end, or worse, ere you are driven forth. Now go, and never let me see you——"

"On my soul, blood and wounds, you go too far!" His voice grew threatening, and he stepped toward her.

"You would dare? Go!" I heard her say again; and, thinking it high time to show myself, I stepped out into the moonlight.

"Did I hear this lady bid you go, good Master Steele?" I asked him, sweetly. "I pray you, obey her." And so, prompted, maybe, by the generous share of mother-wit he boasted, he took his departure without more ado.

When he was gone Annabel turned to me, and hung her head.

"It seems that, after all, I have lost my wager," said she.

"Annabel," said I, very tenderly—for methought that haply she might have cared a little for Master Steele, and that his vileness had hurt her—"if you regret your wager we will forget you made it."

Her eyes flashed me a sudden look I could not understand.

"Fool!" she said, and, turning on her heel, she would have left me but that I put forth my hand and caught her.

"Annabel," I pleaded, "Annabel!"

"Would you have the wager forgotten?" she asked; and her voice trembled never so lightly.

"Would I? I stand to gain much, Annabel. The best there is to be gained in life. But you——"

"Think you I had risked so much had I not been disposed to chance the losing?" she broke in.

With a cry I drew her to me, forgetting the wager and how else I had come to wring that confession from her lips; for when we have gained what we desire it is the way of our weak nature to forget the means by which we have gained it.

The Two-Handed Claymore

By Charles Carey

Author of "The Van Suyden Sapphires," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Roberta Bruce, a New York newspaper woman, is sent to interview Senator William Wallace, to find out if she can the reason for his vehemently attacking England in a recent speech. She finds him reticent, but learns of an old legend which declares that when a William Wallace shall appear on Scottish soil, wearing certain regalia which is now in the Senator's possession, and with the famous Wallace's two-handed claymore at his side, the Scotsmen will rise and throw off the English yoke. By accident, she ascertains that James Douglas, a millionaire, is helping Wallace make a search for the old weapon, and she shrewdly surmises that there is a plot on foot to test the truthfulness of the tradition. Becoming interested, she resigns her position, and induces Wallace and Douglas to accept her as an ally. They arrange that she shall go to England and find out how much the British premier knows of their plans and what his intentions are. Meantime, down in the little South American country of Aureata events are transpiring which are destined to exert a marked influence on their enterprise. Here a revolution is in progress, a Scotchman, one McNeilis, heading the movement to depose the native president.

CHAPTER V.

TO watch Sir John Monteith was the office assigned to Roberta Bruce; to compass his designs and fathom his unconfessed purposes.

Hardly an easy task, one would say. British cabinet ministers are not prone to babbling their secrets in the ear of the first chance maiden who may come along with an invitation to stand and deliver.

Yet there are ways to unlock the most obstinate lips, methods of extracting confidences not dared to be breathed even in the seclusion of the council chamber; and Roberta was by no means cast down at the difficulties of her undertaking.

She first met the famous English premier at the country house of Lady Agatha Pembroke. It was in the height of the hunting season, and Lady Agatha, having as usual gathered a most congenial party about her, was entertaining the county at a ball.

Sir John, who resided only a short distance away from Pembroke Manor, was, of course, present; and, strangely enough for him, was devoting a great part of his evening to Miss Bruce. He seemed to find extraordinary amusement in the chatter of the lively American girl who had been so successfully launched upon English society under the patronage of Mrs. Douglas, and was making an especial effort to render himself agreeable.

This the more remarkable because, as a rule, he was a rather saturnine individual, heavy and uncommunicative, with a tiresome overappreciation of his own importance. Yet he was not lacking in a certain shrewd cunning which stood him in lieu of the acumen of a more profound type; and, on meeting Roberta, he had promptly realized that, having been intimately associated with the family of James Douglas, she might readily be possessed of information it was well worth his while to know. She

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being a woman, he had not the slightest doubt, if such were the case, it would sooner or later be revealed to him.

So the two played at cross-purposes, she leading him on, testing and appraising him, noting for future use his strength and his weaknesses; while at the same time he no less warily was trying to solve her, to determine whether she knew anything, and if so, how best he might induce her to divulge.

He had been endeavoring to explain to her something of the policy and scope of the British occupation of South Africa; and Roberta, although secretly bored to death by his ponderous discourse, was for her own ends forcing herself to appear interested.

"Yet, if the results of your African experiment are so admirable, as you say," she asked, successfully stifling a yawn, "why do you not extend your activities so as to include the southern continent of our hemisphere? I am sure a stable, equitable government is needed there as much as anywhere on the globe."

"You forget, my dear young lady," replied Monteith, with just the suspicion of a sneer, "the primal tenet of your Yankee creed. Europe is obliged to keep 'Hands off!' from that sacred soil."

"Ah, yes; you mean the Monroe Doctrine. Well, I suppose, as a true patriot, I must subscribe to it. Still, it does seem a pity, does it not, that those poor people down there should be subjected to a continual turmoil simply because they are too ignorant and excitable to govern themselves?

"You see," she added, "I know a good deal of the distress of their conditions from one of their leaders, the former president of Aureata. I had such an interesting talk with him one evening just before I sailed."

"Yes?" murmured Monteith, unconcernedly. There was only the slightest lifting of his heavy-lidded eyes to betoken that her words had aroused a keener interest. "I think I have heard of the fellow. A renegade Scotchman by the name of McNeilis, is he not? One hears of so many 'aspiring Cæsars' down there that it is difficult to be quite certain. This one, if I mistake not, cut quite a swath in his peanut kingdom for a while; but, like all his class, subverted the interests of the country to his own selfish aggrandizement, and very justly was driven into innocuous retirement. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*" He finished with a satirical sigh and a smile of derision.

"Oh, I think you wrong him," expostulated Roberta, stung by the other's disparagement to defend a man who, despite their brief acquaintanceship, had thrilled her imagination by the unconscious romance of his personality. "He struck me as anything but the sordid adventurer you picture him. Indeed, he seemed to care nothing for himself as compared to the welfare of his people. Why, his whole heart is wrapped up in Aureata; and he spoke to me, oh, so eagerly, of his longing to return, of his desire to put into effect the reforms he had planned——"

"No doubt," broke in Monteith, dryly. "'The devil when sick,' you know, Miss Bruce, 'the devil a monk would be; but the devil when well, the devil a monk was he!' Still, let us hope that should our friend, the Scotchman, have the chance, he will see fit to carry out his present pious intentions.

"Who knows," he added, watching her narrowly, "but that the opportunity to prove his words may soon be his? The Aureatans have started another revolt in his favor, I understand; and it is barely possible that this time it may succeed. He did not happen to mention to you his opinion of the situation, did he?"

Roberta had been carried a little off her guard by her ardor in rushing to the defense of McNeilis; but the premier's inquiry, casually put though it was, recalled her to the necessity for caution. Moreover, as her quick perception recognized, his present accurate knowledge of Aureatan affairs was a trifle incongruous to the vagueness he had shown in first discussing McNeilis characteristics.

Cleverly, therefore, as he might as-

sume his rôle of indifference, she rightly surmised that the question had been a vital one; and realized that at last she had found a distinct vantage point from which to carry on her future campaign. Let her but convince Monteith that she was able to impart some intelligence desired by him, and, through his curiosity, she believed she could win from him in return whatever she herself wished to know.

Accordingly she fenced. "Ah, Sir John," she said, reproachfully, "you have led me into a predicament. I suppose it really makes no difference should I discuss with you anything which Mr. McNeilis may have told me, and I believe by quoting him I could easily convince you that you have misjudged him. Still, on the other hand, I would hate to have him think that I had gossiped over his affairs. Perhaps, after all, my best plan is to keep my mouth securely closed."

"As you feel about that, of course," he rejoined, a trifle stiffly; "but I think you overestimate the importance of an idle question. My position can never be more than that of a spectator; for, as I have explained to you, England is effectually barred from participation in these New World imbroglios. And, really, in any event, an answer would be of little consequence, since things happen so quickly down in those parts, that any information you possess has probably been already discounted by later advices received at our foreign office."

Roberta played a trump she had been holding back, and took the trick. "Don't be so sure, Sir John," she cried, triumphantly. "News—even official dispatches—filters slowly out of Aureata; whereas I"—there was a malicious little twinkle in her eye—"received a letter from President McNeilis himself only this evening.

"You see," she went on, innocently, "I became so interested in his plans, when he told me about them, that he promised to keep me fully *au courant* with every step of his progress. This letter is in redemption of that promise."

Monteith betrayed his eagerness. "Ah, he has arrived in South America, then?" he questioned, sharply. "We knew that he had left New York."

Roberta was convinced that there was nothing in McNeilis' communication which he would object to her revealing to Monteith, or to anyone else; nevertheless, she quickly saw her present purpose would be better served by a diplomatic reticence. So she sheered quickly away from his question, and laid stress rather upon the assertion that he had made.

"Why, how did you learn that?" she cried, in pretended consternation. "He told me——"

"Yes?" Monteith was leaning forward to catch her words.

"Oh, Sir John," she interrupted herself with a petulant grimace, "I am no match for you. In spite of myself you force me to tell you everything I know."

While they were talking, the music had struck up in the adjacent ballroom, and now, to Roberta's great relief, a tall, light-haired young fellow came forward to claim her for a dance. She was walking on too delicate ground in her tilt with the premier not to desire time to consider her steps, and she was entirely willing to forego for the present any further tests of her strategic skill.

Monteith, however, relinquished her with evident disrelish, and as she rose to leave him, said, hurriedly, in a low voice: "I must see you again, Miss Bruce. You have quite stirred my curiosity in regard to this filibuster of yours, and I shall follow his subsequent career with interest. Only as a spectator, of course; still, as a spectator who understands something of the game."

"I don't know, Sir John"—hesitatingly. "You are so clever; and an unshared secret is a terrible burden to a woman."

"Share it with me, then." For all his laughing manner, he could not hide the note of urgency in his tones. "You could not find a safer repository for your confidences."

"Well, I will think it over," she agreed; and, with a charming smile to

him, moved away upon the arm of her new cavalier.

"Ach!" growled that youth, disgustedly, a slight Teutonic accent apparent in his speech, "the old fox! So he is trying to worm something out of you, too, is he? I knew he would not be monopolizing you all evening unless he had something to gain. A 'safe repository for confidences,' indeed! The treacherous old crocodile!"

She laughed lightly at his tone of boyish petulance. "You seem to have a grievance against poor Sir John."

"Well, and why should I not have?" —sulkily. "All day long has he been at me, trying to induce me to go back to Rudelstadt. What concern is it of his, I would like to know? And, besides——" He paused abruptly, and flushed up to the roots of his yellow hair.

Roberta was so busy speculating over her own problems that she had paid small heed to her companion's pouting. It was merely the break in his remarks which caught her ear. "And, besides?" she questioned, carelessly.

"He has kept you from me all evening!"

"Ah, well," she rejoined, with a glance which set his pulses beating madly, "you have not been the only sufferer by that."

With her it was but a touch of feminine coquetry; but to the boy, smitten with his first *grande passion,* it bore a deeper significance. He had no opportunity to say more just then, however, for the music struck up. She fitted her step to his, and they glided out together upon the floor.

Prince Frederick, of Lucania, heir apparent to the throne of that little German principality, had made Roberta's acquaintance on the voyage over from New York, and since that time had been lingering in England, dancing a constant attendance on her train, despite the fact that his stern old father had dispatched him several peremptory summons to return home at once.

Ordinarily, even such a protracted stay as he was making would have been considered nothing remarkable. He was closely related to the British crown both by ties of blood and of intimacy, and was, moreover, a great favorite in London society, where he habitually spent a portion of each year. But on the present occasion it had not been long before the gossips noted what they termed his infatuation for the American girl whom Mrs. Douglas had introduced, and various highly colored reports of the affair had found their way back to Rudelstadt.

Hence, his royal papa's order of recall; and hence, also, a certain ominous flash in Frederick's eye as he moved beside Roberta, as though he bade defiance to all the world, the strait-laced, formal court of Lucania included.

The dance over, he drew her aside to a secluded corner, where he had carefully arranged that they should be undisturbed.

The heavy, luxurious scent of orchids was all about them; the music from the distant ballroom came throbbing faintly to their ears; a softened light radiating through opalescent globes fell just beyond, leaving the spot where they were ensconced almost in the shadow.

Involuntarily, by some strange force of contrast, the picture rose before Roberta's mind's eye of New York upon a rainy day—the foggy, dismal atmosphere, the mud and slush of the streets, the pushing, jostling throngs along the sidewalks, herself in mackintosh and rubbers herded into a Broadway car, clinging desperately to a strap, while the jam surged and struggled about her, and the odor of damp, crowded humanity assailed her nostrils —and she almost had to pinch herself to make sure that her present estate was not the figment of a dream.

Here she sat amid delectable surroundings, becomingly attired in a gown which was a triumph of Parisian art, her exquisite neck and shoulders, one of her chiefest charms, showing above a shimmer of pink silk, jewels at her throat and in her hair, and by her side the ideal of a prince of romance.

For Frederick was undeniably hand-

some. Big and blond, with his fresh, fair complexion, his yellow curls and his bonny blue eyes, he might have stood for the model of a Viking. He had, too, a winning smile and a frank, appealing manner, the surest passport to a woman's favor. If beneath this outward show of beauty lurked a temperament as willfully wayward, as unreasonably capricious, as that of a spoiled child, what would you? Nature does not bestow on a man the physiognomy of a Greek god without requiring compensation in the way of a faulty mind or soul.

Half lost in her reverie, Roberta had now allowed his words for the most part to pass her ears unheeded; but she was suddenly startled to catch in his low-murmured speech a tone of passionate pleading. He had seized her hand in his, and was fervently beseeching her. "It is because I love you, Roberta," he said. "I cannot help it. I think of you day and night. I cannot live without you. I want you. I must have you. Oh, Roberta, do you understand? I love you, I love you, I love you!"

The girl tore her hand from his grasp and sat stiffly erect. Two vivid spots of scarlet flamed out upon her cheeks, and the happy smile which had lingered on her lips died in a short, hard, cynical laugh.

"Your highness," she cried, laying a satirical stress upon his title, "does me too much honor!"

Prince Frederick gazed at her bewildered. "But," he stammered, "you do not understand. I have offered you my love. I want to make you my wife."

Roberta's face did not soften. "I think I understand quite well," she said, with a sneer; "and I know that there are women who would consider such a proposal a compliment. I am not one of them, thank God; for to me, Prince Frederick, a left-handed marriage seems no marriage at all, and the proposition you have made me, a simple insult."

A light broke over Frederick's pained and puzzled face. "Oh, you mistake," he protested, eagerly, laying his hand upon her arm to stay her, for she had risen as if to leave him. "You mistake, Roberta. I was not offering you a morganatic marriage, but my hand and my heart. I have written to my father today renouncing my title and my succession to the crown; and as a plain man to the woman he loves best in all the world, I now ask you to be my wife!"

CHAPTER VI.

"What!" Roberta was too genuinely amazed at this complete overthrow of the conjectures she had formed, too astonished at the evident sincerity of the prince's avowal, to do more than gasp the single incredulous monosyllable.

Frederick, his face grown grave and anxious under the stress of his wooing, urgently pressed his suit.

"Even at that, I will not be a pauper, dear," he pleaded. "In my own right I will still have revenue sufficient to maintain us in fitting style. I do not mention this to influence you," he added, hastily, as he noticed a little movement of dissent on her part. "I know that such sordid matters would not enter into your consideration; but I tell you simply to show you that it entails no sacrifice on my part to give up the empty honors of my station.

"I have estates here in England, and, if you agree, we shall settle down here to enjoy ourselves among our friends, unvexed by affairs of state, caring nothing for the bickering of nations or——"

By this time Roberta had recovered somewhat from her surprise at his declaration, and she broke in upon the flow of his speech. "Prince Frederick, Prince Frederick," she cried. "You must be mad to dream of such a thing. I am not worth it; no woman is worth the sacrifice you offer!"

"I tell you it is no sacrifice," he insisted. "On the contrary, it is a liberation from fetters which have come to chafe me; but, even if it were a sacrifice, how gladly, Roberta, would I make it for your sake.

"Oh, believe me, dear, if all the crowns in the whole world were to be offered to me to-morrow, they would not weigh a feather against my love for you. You have it in your hands, sweetheart, to make me to-night the proudest or the most miserable man upon the face of the earth; for all I want in life, all I need, desire or could long for, is you, you, you!"

Roberta's lips compressed, and she shook her head. "It would never do, never do in the world," she said. "You may renounce your title and your position, but you cannot get away from your habit of thought and the trend of your entire life. You have been brought up amid the glamour and the flattery of courts and with all the prestige accorded to royal blood. Unconsciously, but none the less surely, you expect from others submission to your will and obedience to your commands. These are the prerogatives of your position to which you are accustomed, and which now, because for the moment they happen to chafe you, you wish to cast aside. But, deprived of them, will you not at once regret them; blame me for having led you to forsake your birthright? 'The woman tempted me,' has been the cry of every man from Adam down.

"Understand me," she continued, staying him with her hand as he strove to interrupt, "I do not question the sincerity of your present purpose, nor the love which you profess to bear me; but I do not think you have fairly considered the consequences. For one thing, I am convinced that a happy marriage is impossible except on the basis of complete social equality between husband and wife.

"As an American girl, I regard myself the equal of any woman on the face of the globe; but the question is not how I regard myself, but how your education and your training must inevitably lead you to regard me. Is it not as a commoner, one of a vastly lower order than yourself?

"Prince Frederick, not for one moment could I bear even the unspoken thought to obtrude itself upon my husband's mind that he had stooped in marrying me. I could not endure the suspicion that he might have such a thought. I am not willing to play the beggar maid to anyone's Cophetua!"

"Nonsense," broke in Frederick, impetuously. "I tell you I am sick of all this business of kingship. If one could be a sovereign in fact as well as in name it might be different; but I have seen enough of the inside workings to know how little there is really in it. What are the kings of to-day? Tools, playthings, puppets for the men who work the wires and pull the strings. Faugh! Don't talk to me of kings!

"And as for my stooping to wed you, Roberta," he went on, "if there is any stooping to be done, it will be on your part. You taunt me with my *sang azur*. Are you not as deep in the mud as I am in the mire? The Bruces were royal when my ancestors were nothing but swineherds. All that aside, though, I challenge any royal house in Europe to grant me a sweeter, lovelier, daintier queen!

"No, dearest; you are raising obstacles where none exist. There is but one question between us to be answered. Do you love me, or do you not? If you do, I care not what all the world may say. I will marry you in spite of everyone, even in spite of yourself. Tell me, Roberta; tell me!"

In the flush of his ardor, the man had actually convinced himself for the moment; so it is small wonder that Roberta was impressed. His musical voice trembled with a fervent longing; his golden head was bent toward hers; his eyes, aglow with passionate entreaty, searched her face for his answer.

It was in truth no more than the insistent demand of his ungoverned nature for a boon denied; and with the return of her clearer vision the girl quickly read it aright. Yet, even so, was it not a situation to give her pause?

As she sat there, the subtle fragrance of the orchids again swept to her nostrils; the sense of ease and wealth and luxury manifest in her surroundings

laid its spell upon her; the bewitching strains from the ballroom, softened by distance to the melody of fairy viols, breathed through the love-laden air.

All this might be hers for the mere acceptance. Her lover, within whose hands lay all these gracious gifts, was waiting for her answer—a lover, too, whom any woman might be proud to claim; an Antinous, beautiful and straight and strong.

It were idle to say that the prospect did not tempt her. She had known too intimately the sackcloth side of existence not to value purple and fine linen at their proper worth. She was no Juliet, remember, no schoolgirl with a head full of romantic moonshine; but a woman of the world, clear-sighted, disillusioned. What if she did not love this headstrong, impulsive boy? She had at least a very strong liking for him. In short, would it not be the height of folly for her to refuse him?

Then, while she hesitated, the thought came to her of those three other men with whose careers her own had become so strangely entangled.

There was McNeilis undauntedly waging his campaign for empire beneath the flaming radiance of the Southern Cross. She ran over again in her mind the letter she had received from him only that day, telling her of his various adventures in that far-away Thessaly of his. He told the story in the crisp, unimaginative sentences which a man of action uses for the description of his own exploits; but with her knowledge of the man, Roberta had had small difficulty in filling the blanks and reading between the lines. Her imagination pictured for her, as in a panorama, the swift march of those events passing far beyond the reach of her mortal vision.

She saw the shades of a tropical jungle quivering in the heat of equatorial midday, breezeless, stifling. It was the camp of the revolutionary party in Aureata; but far different from that same camp on the day when McNeilis had been conducted thither. Then all was dirt, slovenliness, inefficiency; now the hand of rigid discipline plainly ruled. Lack of supplies and inadequacy of equipment were still evident, it is true; but the men showed in their duties a snap and an alacrity which had previously been wanting. The place was thoroughly policed, sanitary regulations were strictly enforced, military method and order had taken the place of slouching disorganization.

McNeilis, stern and spare, his white duck uniform radiant in its spotlessness, his blouse, despite the heat, buttoned up to his chin, was everywhere. Never a word of praise did he speak, rarely did he give an order; but as his keen blue eyes flashed hither and yon, men sprang to do his bidding, and, as if by magic, tidiness and concord followed in his wake.

Before him, by the guards, was brought a young man, evidently a prisoner. Little more than a boy, the captive was plainly overcome by terror at the situation in which he found himself. His face was deathly pale; he bit his lower lip in a vain effort to control its trembling.

McNeilis addressed him in a measured, passionless tone. "Captain Valdes," he said, "ye hae been taken as a spy, and condemned as a spy. Hae ye onything to say wheerfore sentence sud na be carried oot upon ye?".

The young man wavered in the grasp of his captors as though about to collapse; then, recovering himself, faltered: "Have you—have you heard nothing from my father?"

"I hae," responded McNeilis, grimly, at the same time drawing a folded paper from his bosom. "Yir faither, styling himsel' the preesident o' this republic, has deespatched me this note, wherein he states that, gin a hair o' yir head be touched, he will veesit upon me personally a punishment which will cause humanity to quail!"

He tore the paper contemptuously across and cast the two halves fluttering to the ground.

"But you will have mercy?" broke forth the boy. "I am so young! You will not condemn me to death? I will give you my parole—do anything!" He seemed almost beside himself in the frenzy of his desperation. His voice

grew shrill and high. He sank groveling at the feet of the Scotchman. It was a painful and a harrowing episode; yet McNeilis' icy composure never changed.

"Captain Valdes," he said, "as you should weel ken, meelitary law excludes peety. Ye were captured in an attempt to steal papers frae my tent which, had they fallen into the hands o' yir faither, wud hae signed the death warrant o' ilka mon here. When ye entered upon sic an eenterprise, ye should hae counted the cost. Chance has declared against ye, and noo ye maun suffer the penalty. Ye hae feefteen meenutes to prepare for death!"

The prisoner's eyes turned from side to side in hopeless, hunted fashion, like those of some trapped animal. They sought with pitiful pleading the inexorable countenance of his judge; but in vain. There was no possibility of escape from the mandate.

Then the proud Spanish blood in Valdes' veins surged to his heart. He could at least die like an officer and a gentleman. Raising himself to his feet, he clicked his heels together and stood at attention. He threw his head back, and his eye met McNeilis' in a defiant glance.

"You will, at least, señor," he said, haughtily, "remember that I am a soldier, and accord me an honorable death?"

His attitude and bearing engendered sympathy with all the officers who stood about. Alvarez leaned over and whispered eagerly to McNeilis, as though pleading with him to grant the request; but the chief waved him curtly aside.

"Captain Valdes," he said, "I honor ye for yir request; but I am compeeled to refuse. Ye maun dee like a spy!"

Then he stood unmoved while his mandate was carried into effect, watching, with folded arms and unwavering gaze, the whole grewsome spectacle; and, the execution over, turned on his heel and strode calm and imperturbable as ever across the parade ground and into his tent.

There in spirit Roberta followed him, and when he was safely alone, where he thought no eye beheld him, she saw his stoicism relax, his tender heart reveal itself in an agony of sorrow.

"Oh, the puir bit laddie!" he sobbed, the tears streaming down his cheeks. "And yet there was na way to save him! Oh, my God! My God! War is nae mair than jist hell, 'tis true; but this is waur than hell!"

An orderly coughed discreetly without the tent, and instantly the face of McNeilis drew itself into the lines of its usual composure. As he stepped to the door and threw back the flap, his mien had again become one of unfeeling self-possession. Military discipline, that rigid fetich by which he governed his life, denied him even the luxury of compassion.

The vision passed, and now Roberta saw the interior of a committee room in the Capitol at Washington. A group of legislators were seated about a long table littered with documents and books of reference.

A knotty subject was up for discussion, and none of those about the board seemed able to propose a satisfactory method of dealing with it. Man after man had stated his views, only to add to the general dissension and lack of harmony in the council.

It was a great question of governmental policy, marking an epoch in the life of the nation. Settled one way, the decision would probably greatly redound to the popularity of the man who made it. The outburst of public approval it would evoke might easily exalt him to the presidential chair. But, just as inevitably, would such a course lead eventually to national discredit, and the frowns of posterity. So it was that each time-serving statesman hesitated to voice the sentiments which duty demanded but personal ambition feared. They strove, instead, to confound the issue, to cover it up with a multitude of quibbles.

At last, after all had spoken their say, they turned to the chairman at the head of the table, who had hitherto remained silent, and demanded his opinion.

Briefly and concisely he gave it.

There was no attempt at theatric effect; yet the moment was one of thrilling dramatic intensity, for every man there realized that one of their number had risen high enough to sacrifice his own hopes and desires to the welfare of his country.

He made no appeal to the passions or the prejudices of his fellows; but so convincing was his argument, so impregnable was the position that he took, that for very shame's sake they were obliged to coincide with him.

The country had been torn asunder over the merits of the measure, some of the most astute economists had been at sea concerning its possible results; yet in less than fifteen minutes William Wallace, by the force of his intellect and the breadth of his statesmanship, settled it wisely, justly and patriotically, and established a precedent to last for all time to come.

Another scene. Merely a man seated in his private room, high up in one of the lofty edifices of lower New York. A couple of stenographers are at his elbow, and a battery of push-buttons on his desk summon from time to time the clerks he may need from his outer offices.

An immense amount of business is transacted, thousands of dollars disbursed without the flicker of an eyelash, interests involving millions attended to with a word to his secretary, a sentence over the telephone, or a paragraph dictated in his voluminous correspondence; but all with such grasp of detail and such precision that it seems not half so difficult as the daily routine of a country storekeeper. Such is the method of James Douglas when at work.

Roberta tore aside the veil of the future, and demanded to see what ten years of the life he had asked her to share with him would make of Frederick, of Lucania.

She saw the boyish, handsome face beside her grown hard and heavy, the eyes lackluster, with heavy bags beneath them, the cheeks veined and flabby, the mouth coarsened into sensual lines. The fine zest of his nature was blunted. An indulged and lotus-eating existence had spoiled his enthusiasm, and his sole interests lay now in a waste of wealth for the vain pursuit of that enjoyment, the capacity for which had forever passed from him.

The woman sprang to her feet and threw out her hands in protest. "No, no, no!" she cried, fiercely. "I will not consent that through me you should degenerate to that!"

She turned to her companion, an unalterable decision written on her face. "Prince Frederick," she said, "you have done me a great honor, and it would be idle for me to say that your offer does not appeal to me. I am not certain in my own heart whether or not I love you now; yet I believe I might easily come to do so——"

He stepped forward with a glad cry; but again she stayed him.

"No," she continued; "it is not for me and you to love. I have a work to do in the world, and so, I believe, have you." Then she told him the visions her prophetic fancy had conjured up. "These men," she said, "I can aid and assist, it matters not how; but to you I should prove only a hindrance and a clog.

"Oh, Prince Frederick," she broke out, "you have many capabilities, splendid opportunities! Are you content to loll luxuriously by while other men are striving and working; to play, while other men are fighting the world's battles and building the world's cities, are directing the destinies of nations and wielding the mighty forces of modern commerce? No, Frederick; I cannot believe it of you. Life gives you the chance to become a great leader of men: and you will, you shall, you must, fulfill that destiny!"

They were standing, facing one another. Frederick noted the sparkling of her eyes, the pink of excitement flushing in her cheeks; and the influence of her mood mounted to his brain like wine.

He threw up his head like a battle-horse winding the call of the trumpet. "You are right, Roberta," he cried. "I am not worthy yet to offer you my love.

I have not won my spurs. But when I have, when with you for an inspiration I have carved out my career, I shall return to claim you; and then I defy any man or any set of circumstances to keep you from me!"

Brave words enough; but they evoked no answering smile from her. Instead, her lip curled and she turned away with a quick, impatient frown; for, despite their vehemence, they did not ring quite true. There was in them a note of mock heroism, the braggart blustering of a boy.

CHAPTER VII.

"And what tidings these parlous days from our mutual friend, Don Quixote de la Aureata?" questioned Monteith, banteringly, one afternoon, a few days later. "Is he still in the windmill stage of pronunciamentos and proclamations, or has he commenced to assert himself in earnest?"

Roberta had seen more than a little of the premier since the night of Lady Agatha's ball; yet this was the first time he had reverted to the subject of their interrupted conversation. Still, she was not entirely unprepared; for, when she had observed this afternoon that he was drawing her away from the rest of the party returning from the golf links, she had made up her mind to expect some such interrogation, and had been considering with herself how best she might meet it.

It were the part of wisdom, she argued, to explode some sort of a bomb underneath the rather complacent disdain he had shown toward the Aureatan project. She must make him think her the repository of more than ordinarily valuable secrets. Consequently, she had decided to acquaint him with the startling intelligence contained in her letter.

"Would you regard it as an evidence of 'self-assertion,'" she questioned, tentatively, "if I should tell you that, when President Valdes' son fell into his hands the other day, McNeilis promptly condemned and executed him as a spy?"

"Eh?" ejaculated Monteith, stopping short in his stride, and turning upon her. "What's that you say? Executed Valdes' son? Good Lord!" he muttered, under his breath. "The fellow has either gone clear daft or else he is absolutely certain of success. He must know that such an act means nothing less than 'No quarter!' from this time on!"

"I think General McNeilis fully understands that phase of the matter," observed Roberta, quietly. "In fact, President Valdes notified him before the execution that if a hair of the boy's head were harmed, reprisals might be expected which would cause humanity to quail."

"And that with Valdes was no idle threat," grimly commented Monteith; "for at heart, I don't mind telling you in confidence, the president of Aureata is as bloody-minded a savage as ever wore a veneer of exquisite polish and refinement.

"It is, indeed, a crossing of the Rubicon for McNeilis," he went on, musingly. "Bad. Very bad. I was in hopes up to this time that somehow or other the conflict might be averted; but now, of course, any such idea is futile. Still, it may be for the best, after all. Throughout this whole affair, Valdes has displayed an indolence and a *laissez-faire* which have injured him immensely; but this outrage will spur him to action as nothing else could have done. He will never rest satisfied now until his rival is completely crushed."

"You speak as though your sympathies lay with Valdes?" queried Roberta. "Are you not supposed to occupy a neutral ground?"

He gave her a quick glance of suspicion; but the expression on her face was perfectly guileless, merely that of a bland seeker after information.

"England's sympathies lie always with the government in power," he returned, sententiously.

"England's, yes. But how about your own, Sir John? Are you not really almost as eager as Valdes himself to see McNeilis routed and overthrown?"

Monteith bore the thrust with unshaken equanimity. If he hesitated a moment, it was merely for the purpose of framing his reply in more courteous terms.

"Miss Bruce," he said, "at the risk of seeming impertinent, I am going to take a leaf out of your Yankee notebook, and answer your question by asking another. What do you think of Prince Frederick, of Lucania?"

Roberta was fairly staggered at the man's cool assumption. Her eyes flashed in angry rebuke, her cheeks flamed out with two spots of vivid scarlet. "I fail to see, Sir John," she replied, icily, "the connection between my opinion of Prince Frederick and the subject we have been discussing."

He smiled amiably. "Only this," he said: "that Prince Frederick this morning announced to me his intention of going out to Aureata."

"To Aureata?" — forgetting her wrath in her amazement.

"Yes; he said he wanted to get a taste of actual warfare, and that was at present the only spot on the globe where they had the article on tap. Finally, he asked my advice as to with which side he would better ally himself." He paused and glanced at her covertly beneath half-closed lids.

She strolled on a few moments, striking aimlessly with her mashie at the tall spears of grass along their pathway. "And your answer?"

"Oh," carelessly, "I told him that, if I were in his place, I would, by all means, enlist with the regular forces—to join the revolutionists meant nothing but hard service, scant rations and the pleasing prospect at the end of being stood up against a stone wall with a bandage over one's eyes, and in front a squad of greasy Spanish monkeys to mangle you into kingdom come. Shocking bad marksmen, those Spaniards, as a rule!"

"And, I suppose, Prince Frederick promptly accepted your disinterested counsel," sneered Roberta, "and decided to associate himself with 'as bloody-minded a savage as ever wore a veneer of exquisite polish and refinement'?"

"No," replied Monteith, dryly. "Strange to say, he scorned my well-meant admonitions, and declared his purpose of casting in his lot with McNeilis. He must have had other advisers. That is a hardier thing than I would care to do, though," he added, softly; "urge a friend of mine to stand up before Valdes' marksmen!"

Roberta winced just a trifle; but she was determined not to take note of his innuendos. The thought had come to her that this was a trap he was laying in the hope that she might betray herself.

"How can Prince Frederick join the insurgents?" she questioned, skeptically. "Would not such action on his part be construed by the Aureatan Government as a direct slap from Lucania?"

"It would be," admitted Monteith, "were Frederick still heir-presumptive to the throne; but he has renounced the succession, and as a private citizen is, of course, free to do as he pleases."

It seemed as though Roberta were destined to lose every point in this contest of *double entendre* between them. Not once had she been able to get past Monteith's guard, and her self-confidence was becoming sadly shaken under his repeated touches.

"But that must be prevented at any cost," she replied, quickly. "Surely, surely, his father will never consent to it!"

Monteith stopped to light a cigarette before he answered. "I suppose I might as well tell you the whole truth, Miss Bruce," he said; "for no doubt you will learn it, anyhow. Frederick, as I stated, has really resigned his title; but the acceptance of his offer, I will inform you in confidence, is not definitely settled. It is, rather, I understand, held in abeyance for two years, his father consenting that in the meantime the prince may roam incognito wheresoever he pleases"—he hesitated while he carefully flicked the ash from his cigarette —"only upon the proviso, however," he added, in lower tone, "that in the meantime Frederick will not—will not attempt—will not engage upon another enterprise which he has threatened, and

to which his father objects even more strenuously than to the Aureatan scheme.

"Old Prince Leopold was naturally somewhat displeased when Frederick first announced his intentions." A flicker of amusement glided into Monteith's sleepy eyes as he reflected how the irascible old monarch had probably expressed that displeasure. "But he realized his son's headstrong disposition, and of two—er—what shall I say, Miss Bruce? — blessings, chose the least."

"There is no need to be venomous, Sir John," she said, quietly, looking him squarely in the face.

He flushed darkly beneath his sallow skin, and his eyes shamefacedly fell beneath her steady gaze. "Pardon me," he muttered. "You are right. I will not offend again.

"Well," he went on more frankly than he had yet spoken, "the arrangement, you see, is in a way a compromise, the father believing that by the end of two years the lad will have been effectually cured of his folly, and will then be ready to settle down and accept the duties and responsibilities of his station; while the boy only realizes that he is to have a taste of liberty, a period wherein he shall be free to follow whatever romantic whim may seize his fancy.

"Officially"—he laid satiric stress upon the word—"both his father and myself are profoundly ignorant as to his purposes. Our belief is, of course, that he intends to travel like any other well behaved scion of royalty, and that he does so incog. in order to escape the distressing attentions entailed upon him by his rank. The thought would never enter our minds of connecting plain Frederick Leopold, an Aureatan bravo, with his royal highness, Prince Frederick, of Lucania."

"Well, I don't care," observed Roberta, defiantly. "I think it is a fine thing to do, and I honor Prince Frederick for his courage and determination."

"Humph!" growled Monteith, sardonically. "A fine thing, indeed! To needlessly distress and annoy an aged father, and, deserting the plain duties which lie to one's hand, go gallivanting over to the other side of the world to mix up in a quarrel with which one has no earthly interest! These are your ideals of courage and determination, are they, Miss Bruce?

"Were Frederick of Lucania even indirectly concerned," he continued, "or were there a moral principle at stake which might appeal to the honest, if misguided, chivalry of youth, I could forgive him; but when through sheer petulance he sells his birthright for the pottage offered by an unscrupulous adventurer, no! It is a foredoomed cause which he has espoused, Miss Bruce—from its very nature, a foredoomed cause!"

Monteith was a past-master at invective, and now as his ruthless hand stripped from Frederick's poor little knight-errantry its sentiment and spangles, and exposed it to the cold light of common sense, even she was forced to confess that it stood forth bare and shivering, a piece of absurd and puerile bravado.

Yet, woman and ostrich-like, she buried her head in the sand and refused to look. Instead, she caught up his closing words and rolled them with relish from her tongue.

"A foredoomed cause!" she cried, simulating a note of triumph in her voice. "Thank you for that phrase, Sir John. I have finally discovered where you stand. It is certain, at least, that your sympathies, like England's, do not lie with McNeilis."

It was a cheap evasion of the issue, and Roberta was compelled to acknowledge its futility almost before the words were out of her mouth. Monteith was not the one to neglect such an opening.

"I was not aware, Miss Bruce," he drawled, "that anybody ever held any other idea."

Stung to exasperation, Roberta for the moment lost her head and began making wild passes hither and thither in a vain attempt to reach her adversary.

"Foredoomed cause, indeed," she broke out, hotly. "Why, even you yourself admitted that McNeilis' action in executing young Valdes was proof that he believed he would win."

"My dear Miss Bruce, what McNeilis may believe and what I know are two entirely different things. I say to you, and I say it advisedly, that his rash attempt has not the faintest possibility of success."

Her eye flashed and her voice trembled as she answered, sharply: "Yet may not even your omniscience be deceived? Are you so certain that McNeilis stands entirely alone?" If his purpose had been to provoke her to indiscreet speech, he seemed to be succeeding admirably.

"Ah"—and his voice was silky soft as the purring of a cat—"I am not entirely ignorant, perhaps, of the fact that your friend has enlisted the support of Mr. James Douglas."

"Nor I," she returned, quickly, "of the fact that Valdes is encouraged by the British government."

He laughed softly. "Admitting your contention, for the moment, I fail to see wherein it invalidates my previous argument. If you were called upon to choose, which would you prefer—the backing of James Douglas, or that of the mighty British nation?"

Again Roberta lunged out wildly, recklessly. "Suppose, though, that McNeilis had even stronger support than that to which you refer?"

"Pardon me," he bowed, with mock humility. "Far be it from me to even intimate that there could be stronger support than that of an American millionaire."

"Oh, you may sneer and sneer," she flashed back at him; "but when the United States government calls you to book, you may, perhaps, have to change your tune."

"Again, pardon," he answered. "That contingency has also been foreseen and guarded against. I do not think even Senator Wallace's pyrotechnics can induce his government to 'buck up agin'—isn't that your Yankee phrase?—the harmonious concert of Europe."

As a matter of fact, he lied; Russia had steadfastly refused to enter such an alliance. But how was the girl to know the inner secrets of European diplomacy? Consequently, his apt mendacity left her exposed and defenseless.

They strolled on together for a few moments in silence. Roberta, rankling with the sense of defeat, could with difficulty restrain her angry tears; Monteith's bearing, on the other hand, was distinctly airy and self-satisfied.

Suddenly he tossed away his cigarette, and extended his hand to her with a smile. "We don't seem to have gained much by our sparring, do we," he said, speaking far more genially, "except to have lost our tempers? Now, suppose we change our tactics, and treat with each other openly and aboveboard; you tell me frankly just what it is you want, and I will do the same by you. If it is at all possible, I promise that your desire shall be granted. Don't you think that much the better way, Miss Bruce—Miss Bruce, late of the New York *Evening Clarion?*"

CHAPTER VIII.

Roberta's surprise at his unexpected thrust was followed by a moment of poignant mortification.

With rash self-confidence she had plunged into this duel of ruse and counter-ruse against one who was postgraduate in all its wiles and artifices, and, although she might not have been able to master him, had flattered herself that she was at least keeping his rapier fully employed.

Now, she saw that with him it had all been the veriest child's play, and that when he had wearied of the game, he had but to stretch forth his blade and disarm her at a single stroke.

Prone in the dust of defeat, vanquished and overthrown, she saw all that universe of romantic dreams which she had created tumbling in collapse about her.

Then, suddenly, her woman's quick intuition came to her relief. "Why has he taken such a wealth of pains to test

my meager skill?" she questioned. "Surely, not for mere idle pastime, nor to display his own proficiency? No, there must be a purpose behind it all, a method in his madness!"

Strengthened and animated by this belief, she groped about until she grasped again her fallen weapon, and then, scrambling to her feet, once more boldly faced her adversary, her valiant spirit calling its imperative "On guard!" through the medium of her unblenching eyes.

She measured her opponent with her glances. He had shown her the trick by which she intended to conquer him. Candor, was it, that he wanted? Well, he should have as much of it as he gave. He was a diplomatist; but she was a—woman!

They had come to a stile across the hedge of arbor vitæ which bordered one side of the park, and, as if by mutual consent, stopped here. The afternoon was growing late, and the dim, indefinable haze of autumn blurred the outlines of the tranquil landscape. The sun, a ball of glowing crimson, was dropping to the west.

The brown October leaves drifted down about them, and one rested softly on Roberta's scarlet Tam-o'-Shanter. Monteith was not a man much given to poetical musings; but he could not help reflecting, as he stood gazing at her there, in her trim golf skirt, with her brown hair crisped in little tangles above her brow, her lithe, alert young body, her capable hands, her sprucely shod feet, her steady eyes lit with a renewed purpose, that, in her fresh wholesomeness, her engaging witcheries of mood, she might have stood as the very embodiment of the season.

The girl had been looking away with abstracted glance across the fields of faded stubble; but now she turned to him with a smile upon her lips.

"Since you know so much," she said, challengingly, "you surely cannot be ignorant of what it is I want?"

"Nevertheless, I am," he responded; "and that is just the one thing which has been puzzling me about you."

"Yet I know what your desire is."

"What?"

"Well, for one thing, you do not want Prince Frederick to go to Aureata."

His face was as devoid of expression as a *papier-maché* mask. "Perhaps not," he said.

"And the reason thereof is also not difficult to find. He might learn out there some things which you would not care to have reported."

"As for instance——?"

"Why, as, for instance, in what direction and for what purposes the 'sympathy of England' has been extended."

"Reported to whom?" he questioned, sneeringly.

"Frederick is very intimate up at Buckingham Palace."

Monteith shrugged his shoulders. "Bah!" he cried, tapping himself on the breast. *"Moi! C'est l'Etat!"*

"True. But, although politically speaking, the king may be merely a figurehead; still, does he not wield a tremendous influence? Might he not——"

Monteith dropped his assumption of disdainful unconcern. "There is nó need to go into the question of motives, Miss Bruce," he interrupted, hastily. "Suffice it for the present to say that, on one point, you are entirely correct. I do not wish Frederick of Lucania to go to Aureata. If you insist on my reason—well, why not put it on the ground of humanity?"

"Of humanity?"

"Yes," with a quizzical smile. "Valdes' soldiers are such shocking bad marksmen, you know."

"And consequently—on the ground of humanity—you wish me to—to——" She halted with a quick, burning blush.

"To persuade him to stay at home?" he supplied. "Yes," and added, *sotto voce:* "on any grounds you please."

She hesitated a moment; then she spoke softly, but clearly. "Sir John," she said, "since candor is the order of the day, I may as well tell you that I had already decided to do that very thing."

He drew a long breath of relief. Then, his habit of banter still strong upon him: "On the ground of human-

ity?" he asked, with an uplifting of the brows.

"No. On the ground that it is a silly and quixotic thing for him to do."

Monteith studied her a moment in silence. "What alternative will you offer?" he asked, cautiously.

"None. He should have enough sense to realize, as you pointed out to me a while ago, where his plain duty lies."

"Yet," ruminatively, "there are many women who would——"

"You may stop right there," she said, sharply. "There is one woman who would not."

He surveyed her with a long stare of astonishment. "Then will you kindly tell me what the devil you do want over here?"

"You surely must have guessed that by this time?"

"I may be very dull; but I'll swear that I haven't."

Roberta had no doubt that he was again playing with her, trying to mystify her by leading her through devious courses, and then overwhelming her with a sudden turn into the direct path. There was but one way to meet such tricksy methods, and that lay in the absolute sincerity they had agreed upon.

"Well, then," she rejoined, impatiently, "it is the two-handed claymore."

"The two-handed claymore? Ah, it is no wonder that you and McNeilis have been in such close communication."

"But McNeilis has nothing to do with it. He is away over in Aureata."

"And is not the claymore also?"

"Certainly not; it is here in England."

The premier shook his head with an expression of utter bewilderment. "I may be very stupid, Miss Bruce," he said; "but I would really like to know what you are talking about?"

"It seems to me plain enough," she rejoined, pettishly. "As I told you, I want the two-handed claymore — the sword that old Sir William Wallace used when he drove back the English at Stirling Bridge."

Monteith's face betrayed his utter discredit of her statement. "You don't really expect me to believe that that was your sole object in coming to England?"

She nodded her head conclusively. "There was no other reason," she replied.

The premier gathered himself together with the air of a barrister about to examine a stubborn witness.

"Who sent you?" he demanded.

Again that impatient frown, that note of protest in her voice against the rôle of incomprehension he was trying to assume. "Senator Wallace, of course. Who else?"

"And what on earth does Senator Wallace want with a—a claymore?"

Roberta reflected. She was confident that he was merely shamming; yet, it must be admitted, his bewilderment appeared extremely genuine. Perhaps it were prudent not to be too frank.

"What does he want with it?" she repeated, unconcernedly. "How should I know? To add to his collection of curios, I suppose."

Monteith rubbed his hand across his brow, and gnawed at his lip in indecision. "You are not chaffing me?" he ventured, suspiciously.

Roberta disdained to answer.

At length the scrutiny which he had been bestowing upon her seemed to satisfy him. "Miss Bruce," he asked, in a different tone, "on your honor, was that the sole purpose of your trip to England?"

The girl wavered not a moment. True, the claymore had not been specifically mentioned in her instructions; nevertheless, she knew that its acquirement was the sole end and aim of Wallace's present efforts. She raised her eyes, and met Monteith's searching gaze squarely and full.

"On my honor, Sir John," she answered, "that was the only thing which brought me to England."

Monteith began to laugh, softly and to himself; but as the idea grew upon him his merriment increased, until at last he was fain to stop and hold his shaking sides.

"Oh, what fools we mortals be!" he gasped, the tears streaming down his cheeks. "Good Lord! I wouldn't have this known up in Downing Street for a thousand pounds. All she wants is an old sword; and I, poor idiot, thought she was after Frederick of Lucania!"

"I don't see anything so awfully funny about it," protested Roberta, indignantly. "I assure you that with me it is a very serious matter."

"Pardon me, my dear," rejoined Sir John, vainly striving to check his mirth. "I am not laughing at you, nor at your mission; but at myself for being such an ass as to concoct a mystery where none existed. I believed you to be a purveyor of important state secrets, and—er——" becoming suddenly sober as he interrupted himself, and a gleam of his former suspicion flashed into his eye. "By the way, though, why is it that you have been so interested in Aureatan affairs, and how did you come to be so well advised as to what is taking place down there?"

"Oh, I am really interested in Aureata—through meeting President McNeilis and hearing his story, you understand. But I pretended to be more interested than I was, because—well, because I thought in that way I might find out from you something about the claymore."

"But, if you wanted the claymore, why did not you come straight to me and ask for it?"

"To you? Why, I thought it was a possession of the crown."

"Not at all. You may remember, perhaps, that it was my ancestor, John of Arran, who captured Wallace; or, as the Ellerslies insist, betrayed him. For that act, the beheaded chieftain's sword was bestowed upon him, and has remained in our family ever since. I have often handled it when I was a boy, while I listened to my old nurse spinning out her long Scotch legends.

"There is one tradition, I believe, that a feud must forever exist between the Wallaces and the Monteiths, and that it is the bounden duty of each to kill the other upon sight. I recall that I used to wonder what would happen if it should ever be my fortune to meet an Ellerslie, and whether I would be quick enough to pot him first, or vice versa.

"I had not the slightest doubt that a combat *à l'outrance* between us would have been strictly within the proprieties; and so sanguinary were my sentiments toward them in those days that I honestly believe, had I come across one of the hostile clan, I would have attempted to slaughter him with as little compunction as I would have shown a rat.

"By the way," he added, laughingly, "in view of that old tradition, it might not be exactly wise for me to give up the old relic to your friend, the senator. He might use it against me, if our paths should ever cross. I fancy the safer way would be to present it directly to you."

"To me!" she gasped, scarcely believing her ears. "Oh, Sir John, you are joking!"

"Not at all. I have small use for such trumpery, and I do not believe the claymore could fall into more appreciative hands."

"You mean, then," she cried, disappointedly, "that I must keep it myself; that I cannot——"

"I mean that you may do with it exactly as you please," he returned, affably; "but," he added, "you must be sure to send me a penny in exchange. Otherwise, the gift will sever our friendship."

"So you force me to pay for it, after all," she retorted, archly. She was so overjoyed with her success that she could scarcely refrain from shouting aloud.

"Yes," he said, with an enigmatical smile. "I shall want my pay."

They strolled slowly onward, chatting on indifferent subjects, and reached the house just as the soft owl-light was settling.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Norroy, Diplomatic Agent

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "The Ruling of the Fourth Estate," Etc.

[NOTE.—It is not generally known that the Department of State has its own little coterie of secret agents, for, lest their usefulness be thereby curtailed, their identity is jealously guarded, and their doings are never chronicled in the public prints. One of these agents is a man whose keen, incisive brain and marvelous secret service work have more than once solved problems intimately connected with the greatest achievements of American diplomacy. His exploits are part of the diplomatic history of the world, and it is his experiences, only changed and modified for reasons of state, that we have had compiled in the form of a series of stories for publication in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE.—THE EDITOR.]

VI.—THE HONOR OF THE AMBASSADOR

(*A Complete Story*)

CHAPTER I.

THE SECRETARY OF LEGATION.

IN the house of many secrets and unassuming appearance, Yorke Norroy had been waiting for some half an hour, smoking his inevitable cigarettes and gazing out of the bay windows on the shrubbery and well-kept yew hedges. It was very seldom that he was called upon to perform another mission immediately after returning from one which had kept him abroad for nearly six months. Yet the secretary's note was final, and so Norroy had come.

He was running over in his mind his list of invitations, and wondering how it would be possible to cancel them all without suspicion, when the secretary entered, placid and imperturbable as ever. The two men shook hands, and the secretary offered Norroy a cigar, which the secret agent declined. The chief of the state department lighted one himself, and followed Norroy's gaze to the shrubbery. Finally he spoke.

"Can you procure a bid to the Cochranes' house party?" he inquired, without introduction. But Norroy was hardened to startling questions of this sort which seemed entirely irrelevant to his duties as secret agent.

"Why, yes," he returned, slowly. "I think I have a 'bid' now. I'm not quite sure, but I fancy I have. I should refuse it in the usual course of things. House-parties are always stupid affairs, and this one is scheduled for two weeks, I believe. Imagine being chained to the same set of women and men for two solid weeks!"

"Looking at it from your peculiar standpoint of social affairs, I suppose you're right," commented the secretary. "But you are the only man in existence—so far as I know—who can carry out just what an invitation to this affair would begin. Señor de Cabanas and his wife are to be guests—and Gilbert Clayton will also be there——"

Norroy smiled slightly and tapped the corner of his cigarette case on the table. He scrutinized the secretary with his cold eyes.

"So the scandal club influences even the secretary of state," he observed, lightly. He rolled a cigarette between his white fingers and blew the tobacco

This series began in the April issue. The back numbers can be secured through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

away. "Even the secretary of state," he repeated.

"Not the scandal club, Yorke," responded the secretary, gently. "I *know*. It has gone considerably further than scandal. I have female relatives in Washington, you know. I also have some clever agents who move in Washington circles. Incidentally, I attended the ball given by the Andevian minister several weeks ago. Accidentally, I overheard a conversation between a certain lady and Gilbert Clayton."

"Then, to put it very concisely, Mr. Secretary——?" suggested Norroy.

"Quite so! Quite so!" nodded the chief of the state department. "You are right, Yorke. There is no need to beat about the bush. To begin with facts: Eugenio de Cabanas is the ambassador to the United States from the republic of Andevia——"

"Exhibit A," interjected Norroy, with a faint smile.

"The Señora Cecilia de Cabanas is a young and pretty woman. Incidentally, she is an American girl. She has been the wife of Cabanas for a year. He married her because she was wealthy and he needed her wealth. She married him because he is a diplomat and has a Spanish title which is as old as the Cid. Her father was a leather tanner and her mother a factory girl. By virtue of her marriage, she is a light in what we are pleased to term 'society' here in Washington."

"Being Exhibit B," again broke in Norroy.

"Precisely. Exhibit C, to carry out your metaphor, is Gilbert Clayton, son of the former president of Andevia and the heir to a great fortune. Came to the United States from Andevia as secretary of legation. Is young, handsome and, as before stated, wealthy. By nature a rash, headstrong youth, who has had his way for so long a time that he is incorrigible."

"Then the case evidently stands thus: With your permission, Mr. Secretary—Clayton is in love with Señor de Cabanas' wife. Cabanas is in love with his wife, also, a growth since his marriage. His wife is not in love with him, but maybe is in love with Clayton. That's the situation. May I ask how all this bears on the business of the state department?"

"You may—you certainly may," replied the secretary. "Andevia is, at the present time, on the eve of making certain concessions to the United States which will enable her to perfect a commercial arrangement of which you know—I need not go into details on that, need I?"

"No, it isn't necessary," answered the secret agent, lighting the cigarette which he had been fingering.

"Very well. Señor de Cabanas has been the instrument through which the United States has been enabled to make this arrangement. If he were to be removed at the present time, the thing would fall through. This would mean considerable loss of money to the United States, and, what is worse, it would place this country in a position that would call down upon the state department the censure of the press and the people, besides making us the laughing-stock of European diplomatic circles. Which, naturally, would be a condition of affairs we desire to avoid."

"Rather," responded Norroy, dryly.

"From what I have myself heard, from what I have learned, and from what Ferris, Huntley Carson and others have been detailed to discover, Señora de Cabanas is ready to run away from Washington, elope with this young Gilbert Clayton. Suppose such a thing happened? Cabanas would be immediately recalled by his government; would ask to be recalled, in fact. He could not stand the shame of such a position. Nor would Andevia tolerate an ambassador whose marital affairs placed the country in such a light. Result: Cabanas recalled, the arrangement of which I speak falls through."

Norroy puffed at his cigarette for some moments before he commented upon what the secretary had said. Finally he tossed the cigarette into the ash-receiver and looked his chief squarely in the eyes.

"What is the answer?" he wished to know.

"The answer? I should think it would have been easy to read. The answer is, Yorke, that the government of the United States, not wishing such a state of affairs to come to pass, has decided to preserve the integrity of Señor de Cabanas' household."

Norroy smiled. "And with that end in view?"

"It calls on Mr. Yorke Norroy to consummate its end. In plain words, Yorke, you will prevent a scandal. You will not only see that this elopement does not occur, but you will manage the affair in such a way that Señor de Cabanas will not suspect that such a thing was ever contemplated. You will also teach the Señora de Cabanas that such affairs are not fitting in the wife of a man who represents his native land in a foreign country."

"Oh!" ejaculated Yorke Norroy. "Oh, that's it, eh? His cold eyes twinkled. "Rather unusual work for a secret agent, isn't it, Mr. Secretary? And, by the way, since you have told me what I am going to do, will you be so kind as to reveal to me the methods which will bring the affair to such an ending as you describe? I am not a hypnotist, a mesmerist, nor any 'ist' that controls the will of other people. Nor have I the power to keep apart two people who love one another. 'A woman's will is the wind's will,' you know."

The secretary arose. "I don't think it is necessary for me to suggest anything further than that you accept the invitation to the Cochranes' house party. After that, I will leave it to you. You have never yet failed. You are in possession of a fund of ingenuity which has brought many tasks more difficult than this through in the manner desired. Also, you know more about women and their ways than is given to most men to understand. This is Friday, is it not? The Cochranes have issued the invitations for Saturday morning. Suppose you call around and see Lloyd Cochrane this afternoon. Good-afternoon, Yorke."

Norroy shook his hand, the merry twinkle still in his eye. "Don't blame me if I score a failure this time, Mr. Secretary," he said.

When the head of the state department had taken his departure, Yorke Norroy resumed his seat and gave himself over to thought. Presently he looked at his watch and arose.

"A woman's will is the wind's will," he sighed. "And a house party—for two weeks." His tones expressed mild disgust.

On returning to his apartment, he found that the invitation was there, as he had surmised. Below the formal engraved portion of the card was written, in a woman's hand—the writing of Mrs. Lloyd Cochrane:

> Do come, Yorke. We intend to have some amateur theatricals, and there's no one who can arrange them quite like you. Lloyd joins me in this request.

There was nothing to that. Norroy had a dozen other invitations to spend the Christmas holidays, and each one had something similar written on it in the hand of the hostess. For Yorke Norroy was, deservedly, a popular man among the Washington set. First, because he had many ingenious ways of amusing a crowd; second, because his family was one of the few that our English cousins across the way saw fit to include in the "American Aristocracy," and third, because his personality was illusive and inscrutable. Not one of the people who so invited him were aware of his connection with the department of state.

Norroy put Mrs. Cochrane's invitation in his pocket and sallied out for the Cochranes' Dupont Circle home. After seeing Mrs. Cochrane and listening to her suggestions, he arose with a promise to present himself at the Pennsylvania Railroad station the following day at eleven, where the train would be taken for the Cochranes' country place.

"There will be a jolly lot," Mrs. Cochrane had said. "You'll have no end of amusement."

"Yes, I rather fancy I shall have considerable amusement," was Norroy's re-

ply. But it did not mean what she imagined it did.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOLLY OF YOUNG GILBERT CLAYTON.

What particular charm lay for Norroy in the room which he selected, Mrs. Cochrane could not exactly see. She had shown him a plan of the house as they sat in the Pullman, whirling southward, and Norroy had placed his finger on a certain spot which indicated that a room was empty. "Have my traps put in there, Molly," he had requested.

"But that's in the old wing of the house. We put only the married couples there, because the rooms are larger. That room you point out is little and not furnished very well," she remonstrated. "It hasn't even a private bath."

"But it is in the old wing, and it overlooks the creek," Norroy had insisted. He had been to the Cochranes' place before during the fox-hunting period. "I like old rooms. And, besides, there's the view——"

"Oh, very well," she returned. "Have it your own way, Yorke. I was thinking of putting you here" — she pointed to another room marked unoccupied. "It's a much better room. But have it your own way."

So it was that Yorke Norroy was installed in the room directly across the passage from the one which held the ambassador from Andevia and his pretty wife. But any notion that this was the reason for selection did not occur to Mrs. Cochrane, for she was well informed as to the circle of Norroy's acquaintances, and she knew that neither the ambassador nor his wife had more than a bowing acquaintance with him.

During the few days that still antedated Christmas, it did not seem that Norroy had much opportunity to observe the goings and comings of the three people on whose cases the secretary had detailed him. On questions of decoration and arrangement, the assistance of Yorke Norroy was coveted, and, having delivered himself into the hands of Mrs. Cochrane, he could not well refuse to give her the benefit of his taste and discernment. Consequently, he became installed as Molly Cochrane's assistant on the holiday arrangements, and the two spent much time together in the ballroom of the Virginia mansion, where, aided by the servants, they changed the oaken-floored, tapestry-walled apartment into a veritable fairyland of holly, mistletoe, fir and spruce, bedecked with candles and tinsel.

All this took time, and was carefully hidden from the rest of the party. It was intended that the Christmas decorations should come as a surprise to them, and, consequently, during their working hours, the two decorators shut themselves up in the great room and saw no one.

"I declare, I have a right to be jealous," Lloyd Cochrane had said, laughingly. "My wife closeted for four hours a day with the most desired man in Washington. Be careful, Yorke. This is a good place for a duel, you know. The spirit of my ancestors speaks loudly in these walls."

But, in spite of his work on the decorations, the tableaux and the theatricals, Yorke Norroy did not by any chance lose sight of the real reason for his being at Cochranecroft. Twice, gun in hand, he had come across the Señora de Cabanas and young Clayton walking in the woods, and on neither occasion had he given them either visual or auricular notice of his presence, although it was perfectly plain to see that he was simply out on a gunning trip.

Another time he had joined a party of skaters from the house, and, selecting Mona Larrabee as his companion, had managed to keep Clayton and his *vis-à-vis* in sight, seemingly by accident. Mona Larrabee was, undoubtedly, one of the foremost members of the scandal club. She had not a single thought of any weight in her pretty little head, and was, consequently, forced to make conversation out of the foibles and *faux pas* of her acquaintances.

Were the slightest breath of suspicion raised as to the character of any woman, Mona Larrabee knew of it, and when retold it assumed proportions that were hardly credible.

She admired Norroy immensely, as did most of the women of his acquaintance, mostly because she did not understand the man, and, therefore, was obliged to look up to him to a certain extent. The fact that he had chosen her as his companion for the skating gave her several little thrills, and she was exerting herself to be bright, lively and entertaining. Had she known that Norroy had selected her for the purpose of hearing her talk on a certain subject, she would hardly have been flattered.

The majority of the skaters chose the widening of the stream for their sport, and here it was that the fun waged the thickest. The men and women, released from the conventions of the city, forgot their grown-upedness and frolicked about on the glassy surface with all the keen delight of childhood. The stream at this point ran through the Cochrane grounds, and was, consequently, a private inclosure. Therefore, the members of the house party were not compelled to skate in company with those they did not know.

The ambassador from Andevia had remained in the house. He did not understand skating, and, besides, his thin, tropical blood was not equal to enjoyment in the open in winter time. But his wife was there, and with her, as usual, young Gilbert Clayton.

For all Yorke Norroy appeared to join in the games and to listen to the prattle of pretty Mona Larrabee, he noticed that the Señora de Cabanas and Clayton had detached themselves from the rest of the party, and were skating, arm in arm, up the creek and toward the bend, where the trees and bushes hid its upper reaches from the view of those on the lower part. He waited for them to disappear around it, however, before he determined to follow them.

"What do you say to a race up the creek, Mona?" he suggested.

"Yes," cried the girl. "That's better than skating around in a circle. How much start will you give me?"

"Two hundred yards," he answered, as they skated out of the crowd. "Now —ready—go!"

The lithe figure of the girl shot forward, and Norroy waited until the two hundred yards had been fairly taken. Then he started in pursuit, not straining himself, and allowing the girl to keep the lead.

But, as he turned the bend in the creek, he noticed that Miss Larrabee had ceased in her course, and was standing beneath the branches of an oak tree which grew on the water's edge, awaiting his coming up.

When he reached her, he gave her a look of assumed surprise. "Tired?" he asked.

"No," she shook her head. "Don't let's go any further, that's all."

"Oh, very well," he responded, pulling off his glove and reaching for his cigarette case. He lit one of its contents. "We'll go back, then."

"Do you know why I don't want to go any further?" she asked.

"No," he responded, faint interest in his tone.

"Mrs. De Cabanas and Mr. Clayton are right ahead. They're sitting under a tree. I saw them."

"Well?" His inflection showed that he was slightly amused.

"I wouldn't have them think we were following them. But, really, they must give us credit for very little sense. I should think the ambassador's eyes would be opened some time."

"Gossip! Gossip!" he said, shaking his finger, warningly. "He turns her over to Clayton, very likely. Why should women always impute motives?"

The retort angered Miss Larrabee. "At any rate, we can't help but see a thing when it's thrust under our very noses. I don't gossip. I never gossip. You can ask Edith. I don't try to find things out."

The conversation was progressing along just the lines that Norroy intended. He knew no better way to get

the truth out of a woman than to banteringly deny what she said.

"All theory, Mona," he continued, as they skated slowly back toward the house. "You haven't a single bit of ground for your suspicions. You impute—you imagine. Thus a woman's character is ruined——"

"Oh, very well, Yorke Norroy," she returned, her cheeks flushing. "Suppose I should tell you something that would convince you that I have grounds? Not that I care what you think——"

"I'd rather not hear it," he observed, carelessly. "I know the grounds that women have——"

"Well, I shall tell you, then, just to prove to you that women have as good grounds for their suspicions as men. I was in the library last night, back in one of those little alcoves. I had no idea of listening to anyone. Besides, it was nearly twelve o'clock, and I didn't think anyone would be in at that hour. I left the Middlesons and the Parkers playing chess, and stole back to the library to get a book; I had begun it in the morning and was interested. Besides, I wasn't sleepy. I was fumbling around for the electric light in the alcove, when the door opened and two people came in. Then I heard Mr. Clayton say something about loving her enough to give up everything, and she telling him not to touch her. Of course, I knew who it was the minute they spoke, but I couldn't turn on the light after hearing it. So I just sat still. She said she had a husband who loved her, and he said that Señor de Cabanas didn't love her. That he loved her money, and all that kind of thing. He talked on about those things until she got very angry, and said something about her husband being a brute to speak about his wife in such a manner. Then Mr. Clayton told her there was a two o'clock train, and that they could take it, and by the next morning be in New York and engaging passage for Europe. But she said 'no.' Then she said the minute after, 'We should wait until after Christmas'—and——"

"Out of your track a little bit, aren't you?" came the cheery voice of Tommy Fielding, who suddenly turned the curve. "This skating is poor. I'm going back."

"I think we'd better," agreed the blond girl on his arm. "How was it up the river?"

"Rather full of bumps—and jolts," responded Norroy, gravely. The other two turned.

"And Mr. Clayton said 'After Christmas, then. I ask for no better Christmas present.' And then—he kissed her."

"H'm!" commented Yorke Norroy. "Have you told this to anyone else, Mona?"

"No, I haven't," snapped the girl. "And I only told it to you to show you that——"

"Never mind," interrupted Norroy. "I understand. You were right. I was wrong. But don't tell it to anyone else."

"I told you I was not a gossip." Actually the girl believed that she was not, and really her scandalmongery came from sheer inability to hold her tongue rather than from any malice aforethought.

"Well, I believe you," said Norroy, slowly. "I believe you, Mona. But I want you to give me your promise, and I'll tell you why. I am going to take a hand in this matter. Mrs. De Cabanas does not love young Clayton. She has simply taken up with him because she does not understand her husband. Now, there is no reason why there should be another diplomatic scandal, is there? All that is necessary to do is to convince the ambassador's wife of Clayton's pettiness; which, with your assistance, I am going to do."

His words carried conviction with them. Mona Larrabee looked up at him, admiration in her glance. "I'll do all I can to help," she announced. "What shall it be?"

"Keeping quiet when the subject of their affair is mentioned, to begin with—you promise that—faithfully?"

"Faithfully," she returned. "Really, I won't say a word, Yorke."

"And, second, by keeping your ears open and letting me know if an elopement is imminent. But do it in such a way that no suspicion will be aroused. You promise that, Mona?"

She nodded, vigorously.

"Very well, then. I believe you—and I trust you. Don't give me reason to regret it."

"I won't. Really, I won't, Yorke," she said, earnestly. And Yorke Norroy knew from her tone that she cared more for the retainment of his respect than she did to be the first to circulate a piece of scandal.

Nevertheless, as he thought the matter over that night, he was far from satisfied. He did not care to trust a woman with a secret. Of course, it was not his own secret, nor had he told Mona Larrabee anything. He had adopted the only means for keeping her quiet that came to his mind. Not that he was unconvinced that she would keep her word, but Norroy had a peculiar pride in his mission, the same consisting of the desire to accomplish his purposes alone and without aid from anyone.

He had learned a great deal that he wished to know, however, from the little scatterbrain, and finally his feeling of self-satisfaction returned and he whistled a music-hall air.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPECIAL CAR FOR NEW YORK.

Mona Larrabee was as good as her word, as Norroy hoped she would be. This little person respected Norroy to a great extent, and it gave her a considerable sense of importance to be intrusted with his confidence. So for the next few days she went about the house with her small, pink ears perked up for anything which might throw the faintest light on the situation impending. Daily she held conversations with Norroy in some secluded corner, telling him what she had learned—which was little, but, by the same token, all that was in the air.

Señor de Cabanas had lately become a slave to the poker habit, the fine points of which he was gradually acquiring, and he spent most of his time in the smoking room with Lloyd Cochrane and others, playing the game, and generally losing. Cabanas was a very likable fellow, and, strangely for a man of Spanish extraction, trusted his wife to an extent almost inconceivable. He was a friend of Clayton's father, and the youngster was looked upon by him almost in the light of a son. Indeed, it was Cabanas himself who had requested his appointment as secretary of legation.

The fact that Gilbert amused his wife appealed to Cabanas as a very wise dispensation of the fates. He himself, although he loved this American girl with all the warmth and fervor of a Spaniard, had not the little graces which mark the average Anglo-Saxon husband's treatment of a wife. When alone with her he would give his love full play, much the same as he would have treated anything that appealed to his artistic soul. But a consistently loving treatment was something he had not imagined. He had the Old World conception of women to too great an extent—creatures to be petted and humored, and to be loved at such times as it pleased their masters to show affection for them.

It was a mode of procedure which was not in line with the views of his wife. She might have respected, even loved, him if he had been consistently cold. She might have adored him if he had shown warmth throughout their entire relations with one another. But, as it was, she almost hated him for his disregard of her, and despised his weakness when he flamed out into fervid Latin protestations.

At the time when she had fully decided that she cared nothing for her Andevian husband, Gilbert Clayton came to the legation. He was young, well-favored, and gave her the fervor of a boyish love. She had not taken him seriously at first. But as her love for her husband seemed to wane and die, she found that she must have some

substitute. So Clayton grew into her affections.

Had the woman come from a stock with family traditions, her pride would have sent the boy from her. But she was very near the earth. Her father had been a laborer, and her mother of the same degree. They had not taught her to repress her emotions—and she had not learned on her own initiative.

But a few days before coming to the Cochranes' Gilbert Clayton had reached his twenty-fifth year; and, true to a promise made earlier in his son's life, Milner Clayton had transferred an account which reached into the hundred thousands to his son's account in Washington. This had made the young man independent. And——

All during lunch Mona Larrabee had been making signs to Norroy. After the meal was over, he took the first opportunity to join her in the library.

"Well, Mona?" he inquired, when he was sure that there were none to hear. "Tell me—anything new? I'll have to hurry back and join Molly Cochrane, you know. We throw open the ballroom to-night. Christmas eve, you know!"

"Yes, I know. But this is something important, Yorke—I could hardly wait to tell you. I heard Mrs. De Cabanas say to Mr. Clayton in Spanish—you know I understand it very well, because I was on one of father's Cuban plantations for nearly a year—she said, not thinking I'd understand, of course—you know, it was in the billiard room. They were leaning on their cues and talking when I came in with Rolly Parks. Of course, they knew he didn't understand, and they supposed I didn't. They were talking in English before we came in—I know that; but they finished in Spanish——"

"Well?" asked Norroy, amusedly. "What did they say?"

"Why, he said: 'We can catch the *Germania* to-morrow, if we leave on the two o'clock train to-night.' And she said—she was angry, too—'I told you I wouldn't leave until after Christmas—well, I don't think I'll leave at all now.'"

"Well?"

"That was all they said, except he growled out: 'I'll do it anyhow—suit yourself—but I'll do it.' And she said: 'I wouldn't waste my money, if I were you.' But from the way she said it, it sounded as though she were going to give in. And he said: 'I'm going down now—do you want to come?' And she said she didn't and began to knock balls around with her cue, as though she was talking of something that didn't amount to much. She speaks fearful Spanish, and I could hardly understand her—but that's about what they said."

Norroy thanked her, but his look was puzzled. Exactly what the conversation meant he did not know. He remembered now that Clayton had left the house in his automobile a trifle before lunch, and had not yet returned. When he joined Molly Cochrane in the ballroom, he took the first opportunity to ask if any of the guests were leaving before the mask ball, which was scheduled for the night—Christmas eve.

"Why, no," she answered. "Why?"

"Oh, I saw young Clayton pulling out in his auto. I thought maybe——"

"He's not going. He went down to the railroad station to get a special delivery package—so he said—something the station agent telephoned him about."

Several hours later, when Norroy had seen Clayton return without any such package, his eyes lighted up a trifle. He went to his room.

For the convenience of her guests, Mrs. Cochrane had gone to the trouble of having telephones installed in all the bedrooms. These connected with the various parts of the house, and had also a long-distance connection. Norroy asked the girl who acted as clerk for the station agent at Fauquier, the railroad station.

"Hello—is this the station agent? This is Mrs. Cochrane's. Have you a special delivery package for Mr. Clayton? Yes—Mr. Gilbert Clayton—no?

Well, you did have one? No? Well, wasn't Mr. Clayton down there this morning? Yes—I thought so. He was thinking of running up to Washington. He hasn't returned to the house yet—has he gone? No? Well, I told him to get me tickets for to-night's train—did he get them? I was afraid there wouldn't be a train at two o'clock. Oh, there is, then. That's good. So he got the—what, a special car? A special car, you say? That's the New York express? Special through to New York—well, that's right. Thank you. Yes. Good-by."

Norroy put down the receiver. The purport of the conversation was plain enough now. As he began to change his clothes for dinner he ruminated, and the results of the ruminations led to an inspection of the bathroom across the way.

As Mrs. Cochrane had said, there was no private bath attached to Norroy's room; but to offset this disadvantage—which was also that of Roland Parker's, who had the next room to Norroy—the private bath to Mrs. De Cabanas' room had been locked on both sides, and it was here that Messrs. Norroy and Parker made their way each morning. Norroy had observed the door the first morning, and, with his customary retentiveness, the fact that this door opened into the Cabanas' suite remained in his mind.

The two rooms which the ambassador and his wife shared were intended for single rooms, and consequently each one of them had a private bath attached. For this reason, Mrs. Cochrane felt she was doing them no injustice by depriving them of one of them. So it was that the room adjoining Mrs. De Cabanas' came to be used by Yorke Norroy.

After closely observing the door for several moments, and making quite sure that Mrs. De Cabanas had quitted the apartment adjoining, Norroy took a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket and fitted them, one by one, in the door. The fifth one proved efficacious. Norroy turned the lock and opened the door. He confronted masses of portières, which had been hung up to hide the bare wood.

It was all he desired to know. He did not even look into the room. He closed the door and locked it, detaching the fifth skeleton key immediately afterward.

"If," he said, slowly—"if——" He held up the key. The power of following motives and transforming them into future actions was a remarkable part of Norroy's make-up. A possibility had occurred to him, and he was preparing for the possibility.

He slipped the key into the pocket of his claw-hammer coat and went into the smoking room, where he found Cabanas playing poker, as usual. There Norroy remained until the dinner hour.

As he walked toward the dinner room, he remembered that Cabanas would eventually go back to that poker game which he had quitted with such reluctance.

"Is he as blind as a bat, or doesn't he care?" Those were the questions Norroy asked himself as he seated himself beside Mona Larrabee, after escorting her to the table. The guests had turned out in full dinner regalia, in spite of the fact that they must change their dress for their mask costumes almost immediately after. Norroy noted furtively that Mrs. Cabanas had a heightened color, which was not caused by rouge. He also noted that Gilbert Clayton seemed to be in good spirits.

"All of which proves nothing," he commented, mentally. "But why the special car? Is it a speculation, or has she given her consent?"

This was the fourth question Norroy had asked himself, and he was growing rather weary of questions which had no answers that he could give. So, for the moment, he dismissed the subject, and nibbled at the *hors d'œuvres*.

CHAPTER IV.

YORKE NORROY—STAGE MANAGER.

Certainly no better opportunity for clandestine lovers could be given than that same mask ball. It had been de-

creed by Mrs. Cochrane that conventionality was to be thrown underfoot and trodden upon, and, in order that no person should be able to remind her or any of her friends of the same sex that they had been a trifle free in their conduct, the rigors of mask costume had been observed to the smallest detail. Even to Yorke Norroy, who had the Bertillon system in his mind continually, and who could take measurements by it mentally, the figures of the majority of the maskers were unrecognizable.

As may be judged, the liberty allowed by such disguises gave rise to a festive affair, in which restraint was utterly forgotten.

There were waltzes, two-steps and even cake walks; mazurkas, lancers, minuets; two fair ones, who had evidently been preparing for the occasion, gave imitations of skirt dancers, and succeeded so well that many of the men wished exceedingly to know who they might be.

An orchestra had been brought down from Washington, and, stationed behind screens and ferns, they played the popular airs of the day. During the intermissions, the conservatory and the morning room were visited—the latter for the purpose of refreshment, for there stood huge silver bowls, from which liveried servants ladled out portions of punch.

By the time Norroy had been in the ballroom an hour, he had identified young Clayton. Having found him, it was not difficult to figure out that the fair female in the attire of a Watteau shepherdess, who danced with Clayton almost continually, was the wife of the ambassador from Andevia. So Norroy's eyes kept the figure of young Beau Brummell in sight, and watched his comings and goings with more than usual interest. Part of his watching bore the fruit of informing him that the couple in whom he took so much interest missed many of the dances, and sat much in the conservatory. Also, that their visits to the morning room were frequent. He need not have been in the morning room to see that, for it was perfectly evident that young Beau Brummell's legs were not as steady as they might be toward the third hour of the ball.

There was some one else whom the melancholy Dane sought to identify. The cold eyes behind the black mask of the man in the attire of *Hamlet* sought continually for Mona Larrabee, but it was some time before he found her, in the shape of a page boy of the days of Louis Quinze, her shapely form in the velvet knickerbockers, silk stockings, red-heeled slippers and tailed velvet coat. It was a tiny mole on her chin which betrayed Mona, and Yorke Norroy told her so.

"Ssh!" she warned, in a sepulchral whisper. "Ssh!" When he had led her to the conservatory, she watched him smoke and listened to what he had to say.

"You noticed the girl in the pink Watteau attire?" he asked, in a low tone. She nodded. "Mrs. De Cabanas—and, of course, you know her partner?" She nodded again.

The dance music struck up, and the couples began to file out of the conservatory. The two of whom Norroy had spoken swished past them, as did all who had been sitting in the conservatory, save only the melancholy Dane and the little page of the Louis Quinze period.

"You see where they sit?" Norroy whispered. "Right there." He pointed to a seat before a bay window. "Well—if you'll do it, I want you to lie down behind those ferns as though you were asleep. It's dark over there, and, besides, your costume harmonizes with the greenery. I couldn't do it. I'm too tall." Quickly he told her of the special car. "We must know definitely whether or not they intend to take it, if we are going to prevent them—you understand?"

"I don't like to eavesdrop," objected the girl.

"It's in a good cause," answered Norroy. "And, besides, if you're discovered, there's no risk for you. You know too much for them to dare unmask you—and, besides, I'll be some-

where near by. Will you do it—quick? The music is going to stop."

"Yes," agreed the girl, rather unwillingly. "I'll do it." She moved across the room and lay face downward in the place which Norroy had pointed out. A moment later, Norroy was in the morning room, and the couples had begun to file into the conservatory again.

From morning room he wandered to the smoking room, where, as he had surmised, he discovered four masked men playing poker. It was not difficult to see that Cabanas was one of them, for his mask was tilted and showed his pointed Vandyke beard. As Norroy watched them, without revealing his identity, another man came in. It was young Beau Brummell. He remained but for a moment, then made his exit.

It seemed as though the music for the next dance would never begin, but, when it did, Norroy again sought the conservatory. As his tall figure came into view, the silk-knickerbockered figure of Mona Larrabee rose from the bay window.

She cast a careful glance around, then caught Norroy's arm. "She is going to leave the ballroom after this dance. She is going to her room and change her dress for a traveling suit. He went into the smoking room and found her husband playing cards; told her he was good for the small hours. Then he said that while everybody was engaged—servants and all—they could slip out without being noticed. He has his automobile in a little outhouse down by the turnpike, and they'll walk to that, then ride to the station in the auto. Oh, how can a woman do a thing like that!" The girl paused for a moment. "But, really, Yorke," she said, very seriously, "I don't think she would have consented if she had taken less of the punch—really I don't."

Norroy held out his hand. "Mona, you're a brave little girl. You've prevented this from happening—the credit is more yours than mine."

"But who will prevent it? How? You don't want to have a disgraceful scene?"

"There will be no scene. Where will they meet when they have changed their clothes?"

"He is coming to her room at one o'clock. She will be ready then. How are you going to prevent it, Yorke?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow morning, Mona. Now give me your word again that you will not breathe a word of this."

"Have I said a word—yet?"

"No—but——"

"Well, I won't. Now that's settled, Yorke. Suppose we dance this waltz?"

They whirled in on the polished floor to the music of the "Valse Bleue." When the strains had died away, they made their way back to the conservatory. But there was no sign of a pink Watteau shepherdess there, nor was Beau Brummell visible. The morning room revealed neither of them, nor did the smoking room, into which Yorke Norroy ventured alone.

He rejoined Mona a few moments later. "Well, I'm off, Mona," he said. "I will see you in the morning. And so will Mrs. De Cabanas and Gilbert Clayton."

"But how, Yorke?" she asked, eagerly.

"Keep mum." He laid his finger on his lip. "And wait. Perhaps I may be able to tell you an hour from now. Wait until then, at any rate. The affair won't be over until three, at least. Wait until then. And now, for the moment, *adios*."

He left the morning room and ascended the stairs which led to his apartment.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORKING OUT OF THE PLOT.

When Norroy reached his own room he switched on the electric light for but a single moment. In that moment he possessed himself of a very minute Remington revolver, and took the skeleton key from the tail pocket of the claw-hammer coat which lay across a chair. Then he glanced at his watch, and saw that it was ten minutes to one. He extinguished the light, opened his door

a trifle and knelt down by the opening. He could see faint rays of light through a crack in the door of Mrs. De Cabanas' room, and he knew, from several bumps and jars that he heard, that she was tossing articles about the room—evidently packing.

It was pitchy black in the passageway, for Norroy had taken the precaution to switch off the electric current that communicated with the chandelier near his own room. Save for the occasional jolt from Mrs. De Cabanas' room, it was also very quiet. Norroy waited.

Presently the sounds of footsteps coming down the hall could be heard—though the footsteps were very light, and the pedestrian seemed to be treading softly. They stopped before Mrs. De Cabanas' door, and Norroy could faintly distinguish a man's form. Then came a light tap—followed by two louder ones—on the door. A moment passed. The man tapped again. Cautiously, the door was opened.

"I am not ready," said a woman's voice. "I am not ready. Go away."

"Go away?" came in Clayton's tones. "No, no, Cecilia, let me in."

"I can't. I won't. Come back later. You can't come in." The door was closing when Clayton threw his shoulder against it and it flew open—a great flare of light in the darkness showing Mrs. De Cabanas attired in a gray traveling dress.

There was an angry protestation, and the door closed again. But this time Clayton was on the inside of it. Norroy heard a key turn in the lock.

For a moment he cogitated. Then he saw that this action on Clayton's part had made his own plan far easier than before. With a grim smile, Norroy arose in the darkness and took down the telephone receiver.

"Hello—yes, Miss Grey—give me the smoking room, please." There was a whirr, and some one growled out: "Well—who's this?"

Norroy's ability to mimic the tones of others was never better displayed. "I want to speak to Señor de Cabanas," he said, weakly, and in the tones of a woman in pain. "His wife." "Oh—excuse me, señora," said the voice at the other end, more civilly. A silence, and then the tones of the Andevian broke the silence, inquiring in Spanish as to the wants of his wife. "I am ill—I have gone to my room—I am very sick—come—at once," was the reply, in Mrs. De Cabanas' voice.

With another smile, which almost threatened to become a chuckle, Norroy placed the receiver on its hook and crossed the passageway into the bathroom. He fitted the skeleton key in the door and opened it noiselessly, coming into contact with the portières. Clayton was speaking.

"We can't put off going. It's tonight or never! You *must* go, Cecilia—you must go!"

"What right had you to come in here?" she demanded. "What right? This is my husband's room and mine."

"You promised me you would go tonight. The special car will be ready for us. We can slip out, and no one will be the wiser. My automobile is waiting——"

"I can't, Gilbert—oh, I can't!" She was weakening. But that she was sorry that she had made the promise was evident. "Gilbert, I can't. I was foolish when I made that promise. I couldn't face the world. We've done nothing yet that can't be retrieved. I have been faithful—but if we go—I couldn't stand it. No, Gilbert, you had better go—you had better go!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," he cried, fiercely. "Nothing of the sort!"

"Ssh—ssh," she interrupted. "What's that?"

The sound of some one running rapidly down the hall came to their ears. "Oh, what is it, Gilbert? Who is it?"

"I don't know," he returned, sullenly. "It doesn't concern us, anyway."

The footsteps stopped before the door, and some one turned the knob. But the door was locked, and failed to yield.

The woman staggered back across the room. Clayton faced the door fiercely.

"Open the door, Cecilia," came the tones of the ambassador from Andevia.

"My husband!" the words came out in a tense whisper. "My husband—my husband——"

"I have come, dearest," continued Cabanas, outside. "I have come. Dr. Rand will be here in a moment."

As though sustained by a sudden stimulant, the woman rushed across the room and opened the window without noise.

"Jump out—jump out, Gilbert!" she whispered. "It opens on the creek. You will only be wetted a trifle. You can swim. Jump—jump—oh, my God! if he should find you here——"

"I won't jump," said Clayton, firmly. "I won't jump. Let him come in and find me."

The sound of other footsteps coming up the hall were now to be heard, and presently Cabanas spoke to some one in a hoarse tone.

"She doesn't answer, Rand," he said. "She must have had one of her fainting spells. If she isn't revived, it may be dangerous. I haven't a key—what shall we do?"

"Why, break down the door, of course," said Rand, the surgeon, in a matter-of-fact tone.

Without hesitation, Cabanas thrust his shoulder against the door. But it was of strong wood and did not yield. "Wait, I'll get a poker from my fireplace," said Rand, again.

But Cabanas still continued to push against the stout oak, and the door creaked under the pressure.

"Jump!" whispered Cecilia de Cabanas again. "Oh, Gilbert, jump!"

"No!" he cried. "I'll open the door—and open his eyes at the same time. Then you must leave with me." He started toward the door. The woman clung to him.

"Stop—stop!" she panted. "Stop!"

He turned to shake her off, and at the same moment saw the portières part and a tall, slender figure in black silk tights of the Elizabethan period appear. In one hand the masker held a small Remington revolver.

"When a lady asks a favor you should accede. Now, don't argue the question. Go into that room—quick!"

"I'll do nothing of the——" What Clayton intended to say was never quite clear, for the moment his lips parted for speech, the lithe form in black hurled itself against him, and, catching him about the neck in the crook of his elbow, Norroy whirled him about to the entrance of the little room. Then, without the slightest hesitation, the secret agent brought the butt of the Remington down on Clayton's head, and the young fellow became limp in his arms. Norroy pushed him into the bathroom and turned to the woman, who stood white and ghastly in the moonlight, her hands covering her face.

"Mrs. De Cabanas," said Norroy, evenly, and in a voice which was not his own, "who I am does not matter. I am your friend, for this once at least. I knew of your intention to run away with young Clayton. This is my means for preventing it. A few moments ago, by feigning your voice, I called up your husband on the telephone, and, pretending to be you, told him that I was very ill."

As he spoke, the crash of a heavy instrument on the door was heard.

"He has brought a doctor. I leave the illness for you to explain. I'll look after young Clayton, and, so long as you continue to avoid him, you can trust me that this story will never be made public."

At the second blow of the poker he closed the door hastily, and locked it from the bathroom side. Then, in the darkness of the bath, he heard the blows continue.

The ambassador's wife, her wits working, lost no time.

She hastily tore off the traveling dress and threw it into a closet. Her bags, which she had been packing, she threw after it, and, pulling on a lace-embroidered *robe de chambre,* she crawled into the bed and beneath the coverlet. By a quick jerk of the fingers, she pulled the pins from her elaborate *coiffure,* her hair falling in confusion over her shoulders. The next

moment the door crashed in, and Cabanas switched on the electric lights.

At the sight of her on the bed, he rushed to her side. "Dearest, dearest—what is wrong?" he cried. "Are you ill?" His tones showed the deepest throes of emotion.

She opened her eyes slowly. "Oh—oh——" she murmured, then stretched her arms.

"Are you sick, *carissima?*" he cried again. "Ah, Bonita, Bonita, are you ill?"

"No, my husband," she said, softly. "Not now. I *was* ill. I am well now—I am well now, Eugenio."

For the first time realizing what she had so narrowly averted, the satisfaction of still being one who was faithful came to her with sudden gladness. "Oh, my husband!" she sobbed, in his arms.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.

"Well," continued Norroy, when he had reached that stage of the story, "I spent a vigil of about an hour in that accursed bathroom, after which things quieted down, and I carried young Clayton to his own room and laid him down on his bed. I knew that there would be no doubt of his remaining in his room, but I took the precaution to lock him in and leave the key on the outside of the door. Then I returned to the ballroom and told little Mona Larrabee all that was needful for her to know. I couldn't avoid that. She knew too much already, and there was no way of letting her out of it. She has given me her promise about it, and I think she'll keep her word."

"And how did Clayton take it?"

"He raised a howl in the morning about being locked in, but the men chaffed him about being full and having a trick played on him. He didn't say much, and the lump on his head he did not even take the trouble to lie about. He was waiting to see Mrs. De Cabanas. She came down to a late breakfast, and, hang me, if her husband didn't dance attention on her the whole day. But she managed to get a word in with young Clayton at some period, for he kept religiously away from her after that, and did not turn his head whenever her husband came his way. In fact, he took Cabanas' place in the poker game when Mrs. De C. sent for Eugenio. I heard him say at the dinner that this was his last Christmas in the United States—so I suppose he'll throw up his secretaryship. It's the only decent thing for him to do."

"He resigned to-day," said the secretary, pointing to a notice from the Andevian legation. "And thanks to——"

Norroy held up his hand. "Only partly," he insisted. "That little Larrabee girl is to be thanked as much as I." He lighted a cigarette. "And now, with your permission, Mr. Secretary, I think I'll keep an appointment to play golf with her—at Chevy Chase. Coming out this afternoon? Oh, well, then, I'll have the pleasure of introducing you."

THE OCTOBER COMPLETE NOVEL

Like all the leading novelettes published in ***The Popular Magazine*** *during 1905, that which will appear in the October number will have to do with one of our great national industries. In this instance the theme is railroading, and the author, Mr. Francis Lynde, has made the most of the splendid opportunity accorded him. You will like* ***"The Empire Builders,"*** *whether you are interested in railroading or not. It is a very fine story—the sort that grips your interest from start to finish*

TWENTY CAMPERS

By Charles Fort

Mr. Fort herein describes how the mountain obligingly came to Mahomet when there culminated a business feud between two members of a party camping out in a supposedly remote spot

WATERMELONS were undulating in a green streak from a cart to the rear of Leonidas Marcy's store. Men in a line caught melons with a sharp slap on each side, and turned just in time to catch another, with catching and throwing in one motion. Only a moment's delay would mean a melon against ribs instead of between hands, but these men were expert "passers."

The watermelons belonged to little Marcy. He seemed uninterested in them. Barrels and crates were his. He turned from barrels and crates, for there was something else that absorbed all his imagination. It was the wall of the warehouse next door. The wall was slowly settling. Some day it would lean over Marcy's property; then the vengeful little fellow would sue.

Marcy chuckled; his neighbor, Hiram Ramshack, knew nothing of the wall's trespassing. Some day he would be informed by a stiff, folded paper with a red seal. Then Ramshack would rage. He would be put to great expense and inconvenience. Marcy would look across his passageway from his office window and would see tearing down and rebuilding. He would be happy. He could picture Ramshack's impotent fury. He would be very happy.

The wall was encroaching at the rate of about an inch a year. At last it was over the dividing line. Marcy went to see his lawyer to tell him what to do, almost running in his excitement—in fact, breaking into a trot before he was halfway.

But as to "Doc" Sordorst. Doc Sordorst came to town as a physical culturist. During the winter he prospered, but in the spring he made a mistake. It seemed to him that a summer camp would be a paying investment; this belief was caused by the enthusiasm his suggestions evoked.

"Pure air, Mr. Ramshack!" he said. "Just what you need! How would you like to join in with several dozen of our townsmen for two weeks or a month in the woods?"

Said Ramshack: "Fine! Just what I've always wanted. I'll go a whole month with you. Sort of communing with nature, hey? I've always wanted to commune, though would have to be shown how first."

A dozen, and then twenty, townsmen said: "It's the best way of spending a summer that could be!"

Then came the mistake.

Doc went ahead and built his camp. It was on Lake Muggins. Lake Muggins was only twenty miles from the city.

Said Ramshack: "Muggins! What a name! And how can one get into the heart of the woods and commune at only twenty miles away? I think I'll keep on working all summer, and then take a good long rest next year."

Said others: "Muggins! Now, if it

only had an Indian name—but Muggins! Might as well camp out in the park as only twenty miles away."

"Muggins!" exclaimed the twenty, as if playing a game.

So Doc Sordorst had a camp on his hands—as it were, of course. He thought the matter over. He worked hard, for thinking is hard work. One seems to wrestle, yet with no tangible opponent; thinking is grasping without hands and digging without arms. Wrestling and grasping and digging went on in the top of Doc's head, until an idea came.

Said Doc: "Then, if they won't have a lake with a commonplace name and only twenty miles from the city, I must give them what they do want."

And just how sensible was this decision you would realize were you acquainted with these recalcitrant campers. There was "Little-neck" Leonard—close as a clam! And "Hard-shell" Patterson—impervious to everything not strictly along business lines. Ramshack, Marcy and the rest were quite as little-necked, hard-shelled and impervious, while the city itself was known in surrounding villages as "Squeezetown," for it was the center of grinding, and pressing, and getting as much over a dollar's worth as one could possibly get for a dollar.

Said Doc: "It's pretty hard to lose all the labor and cost of my camp, but still there may be something in it for me. I'll have to satisfy them."

He went away. He came back.

Said Doc Sordorst: "And now you will be pleased! I've located an ideal camp this time, and it will be ready in a week. Ideal, I say! Right on Lake Longuelia, named after the famous Algonquin chief. Nestling in the Adirondacks!"

"The Algonquin chief!" exclaimed twenty seemingly impervious business men. But one force could make them momentarily forget grinding and bargaining; it was a tucked-away and covered-over joy in the picturesque, which stirred into life so that, just for a moment now and then, stock reports were forgotten, and all repeated:

"Nestling in the Adirondacks! That's fine!"

Now, each of the twenty could have gone to the seashore, to New York, or even to Europe without ostentation; but to go camping made each feel himself so interesting that he wanted to parade or have fireworks, even though the going away would be early in the morning. For these interesting twenty would sleep in bunks; they would gather around a camp fire; they would hear the sounds of a forest at night. There would be no Indians to battle with; no bears, no panthers; besides squirrels and woodchucks, there would be no animal life; yet the feeling of what had been was upon each of the twenty, as he felt upon himself the atmosphere of the mighty hunter and pioneer.

Perhaps the best pleased of all was Marcy. He chuckled, and no wonder; for he was preparing a very fine joke.

Said Marcy: "And now I'll make that Ramshack squirm for swindling me that time! Just as he's enjoying himself most, he'll get word that his wall must come down. It'll spoil his vacation, and I'll grin derision at him. That's what I call great!"

Hard-shell Patterson was the first to reach the station one June morning at seven o'clock. He was a big, fat old fellow, who all his life had worn sober and respectable black. This morning he wore yellow, blue and green knickerbockers, a sombrero, a belt with holsters on it.

Marcy strolled in, grinning a little because he was so conspicuous. A cowboy hat, leggings the color of molasses held up to the sun, a crimson sash!

Queer! One associates picturesqueness with manliness, as in the life of the trapper, the cowboy, the scout. And yet picturesqueness is close to effeminacy—bright colors, soft sashes, long hair. Which may be a sage reflection, but sage reflections may be out of order on June mornings at seven o'clock.

Then Ramshack appeared. A shooting coat and leather boots. A pith helmet! For many years Ramshack had grubbed amid canned goods; there he

was, aflame with his sense of the picturesque.

Seventeen other barbarians, dressed as if to play "character" parts, came to the station, each advancing to the growing group of his fellows, beginning to grin as soon as in sight, in embarrassment that heightened until he was near enough to speak.

Marcy was whispering: "Look at that Ramshack! If he isn't a sight!"

And Ramshack was nudging some one, saying: "Well, if that Marcy isn't the worst-looking comic valentine I've ever seen!" But upon all twenty was the feeling that to go camping was the most extraordinary thing in the world.

"All aboard!"

The engine jolted back against the train in an engine's uncivil way. There was a blast of a breath, quicker puffs, jerky snorts and a rushing away.

You would have thought the car occupied by the twenty owned outright by them. Such exclusiveness! Snobbishness radiated from them so that a drummer got up and went to another car. Other passengers followed. For they were only commonplace citizens; the twenty were going camping.

And internal snobbishness, as well! Old Patterson wore a frown ten miles long as the train rushed north; then a fifteen-mile scowl. For he was prominent and leading, whereas some of his fellows were in a small way. Some were clerks. No wonder old Patterson scowled along the map. This one detested that one; others were disgusted to find themselves companions with those that they disliked most. Everything was unpleasant and ominous, in fact.

"Change cars!"

Changing cars was interesting, for it seemed to suggest going to greater remoteness. Then Doc Sordorst came out in an unexpected way. He was in command. The campers were his "patients," and in every trifle would have to obey him, or—well, take a train going the other way.

As if saying to himself, "Oh, you put me to all that trouble and expense, did you?" Dock bullied and harassed, pretending great solicitude as to health, making his "patients" sit together on the sunny side of the car, seeming to enjoy antipathies as unfriendly members of his party sat side by side; forbidding them to leave their seats for fear of draughts—well, Doc had planned an evening of scores, it seemed.

"All out!" Some tumbled out, some stepped out with dignity; all felt the marvels of steam and iron; it was early in the afternoon, yet many were the milestones left behind.

There were wagons waiting. Some "piled in"; some of the fat old fellows clambered into carts with difficulty; under a hot sun and over a dusty road, the twenty rolled away. Then the heat of the sun was turned to balminess by overhanging boughs, and the moisture of the woods was in the softness of the road. A blue patch shone through green leaves. Glimpses of blue were hung in the trees, and then cool blueness stretched like a sky upside down.

Said Doc: "Lake Longuelia, boys!"

And the only suitable response seemed to be: "Hooray!"

"Here's the camp!"

"Hooray!"

The twenty jumped into color. Green overhead, brown of pine needles on the ground, and blueness gently rolling pebbles on a yellow beach. There was a hut. It was made not of wood such as houses are made of, but with corrugated sides of slabs cut from the sides of trees. And the slabs had bark on! No wonder the twenty said: "Hooray!"

Said Ramshack, as if recognizing, yet not quite sure:

"Why, it's nature! Say, how is it they commune?"

He said: "Hello, Marcy!"

Marcy discovered Ramshack.

He said: "Why, hello! Feeling all right after the trip?"

"Why, yes, thanks; that is, all but the cinder. Never went on the cars yet without getting a cinder in my eye."

Said Marcy: "Let me see; maybe I can get it out for you."

Marcy made Ramshack hideous by twisting his eyelid, and with the corner of his handkerchief removed the cinder.

Then Doc, the tyrant, really began his campaign of revenge.

He said: "Some one must chop wood." And for this task he detailed young Shaster and old Patterson. Shaster had been the old fellow's bookkeeper, but their business relations had broken up in a fine row. A brass-edged ruler had been flourished, even though whacked harmlessly only upon a desk.

The old fellow looked at the young fellow.

He said to himself: "It was double dealing for Doc to withhold that young scoundrel's name until the last moment. I shall see to it that none of my friends have anything to do with him."

Said young Shaster: "Just let me get in a boat with that old miser! That's all!"

But he soon saw that murder in some other form would have to be turned to. Not in twenty years had the old fellow been in a body of water, except as an island in a bath tub.

Old Patterson, a remarkable sight in tights, stood ankle deep at the lakeside. Then he retreated, scratching the tickling of drying water on a left ankle with a right toe.

Some one laughed. As if leading a regiment, Old Patterson marched into the lake, pushed out a great wave in front of him, and, to his own and general astonishment, swam as well as ever he had. Swam on his back and then floated with drifting toes and nose; dived and swam under water; even Shaster exclaimed: "Good enough!"

They had dinner on a rough plank for a table.

Some one said: "Please pass the butter."

The others thought this too civilized, and felt that something was missing, until some genius cried: "Slide the grease!"

"Would you kindly pass the griddle cakes? What? No way to talk? Then sling us a grid."

And where in all commonplace, uninteresting civilization would you run across such a joke as taking the request literally and flapping a hot disk at an eye?

"Slam us some bread!" called Patterson, the jolliest old boy in the woods. Young Shaster grabbed half a loaf and twirled it, the old fellow catching as if he had spent his life behind the bat, the young fellow looking greatly as his wife looked when she felt called upon to exclaim: "Oh, I forgot! I'm mad at you!"

Said old Patterson: "I'll bet ten cents I can climb to the top of that maple tree as fast as anyone here!"

Which caused admiring Shaster to cry: "You're all right!" And half an hour later he was helping as mightily as anyone to dislodge the old fellow, who had climbed but had stuck in a fork twenty feet above the ground.

And because he could swim as well as when a boy, Patterson, ponderous and clumsy, seemed to feel that he could do everything as well as when a boy. A heartrending crash! Old Patterson had tried to leap over a bench. Groans and gasps! Tried to turn a somersault to win back the ten cents lost in the maple tree.

Night came on. Chill was in the air. The campers discovered the logic of fire worshipers. They have a god who does something for them. The god sprang high from a pile of pine knots and spread away in snapping sparks. There was the gayety of twenty boys in a circle of light, with the mystery of blackness around. A sixty-year-old boy was so disrespectful to his elders as to fill the pipe of a boy somewhat older with pepper and a layer of tobacco on top. And if that was not a good joke!

Some one pushed a log from under Patterson. The old fellow's heels were in the air. Never had he enjoyed a better joke!

Said Patterson: "When I was a young fellow, I had a fine tenor voice. I'll sing with anyone here."

And he sang in a voice ridiculously high and out of proportion to his bulk,

while little Marcy joined in with a voice quite as disproportionate, so awesomely deep and rumbling was it.

Ramshack could not have told what he felt, but he was moved. Perhaps the feeling was atavistic in their make-believe primitive life. They were adventurers in a savage land, perhaps; and all would help one another against foes, whether human or beast.

Ramshack tried to express something of this, and he turned to Marcy, as if to indulge a pleasure in an enmity that in the forest could not exist.

He said. "This is great!"

All that Marcy could answer with was: "Bet your life!" But it was a response that made Ramshack say to himself:

"Why, Marcy's the finest fellow on earth!"

The fire god had sunk to a smoldering that could not leap.

Some one said: "We'd better put out the lantern and retire."

And what a thing that was to say! One could hear something like that in any civilized home. But it was a joke, because everything was a joke.

Some more experienced woodsman amended:

"Naw! Douse the glim!" Which was wording more in harmony with rough pine slabs and pine needles for a floor.

The forest came to life: the honk of the wild goose; the hiss of a serpent; the growling of a panther; the swishing of arrows through leaves. But only Marcy heard the snoring, for only he could not sleep.

Marcy thought of the surprise he had prepared for Ramshack. He did not chuckle this time.

Sometimes the twenty were boys, and sometimes they were very young children. Everything pleased them; idly leaning head down over the side of a boat to look under at deep light from the side not shadowed; thrusting sticks into the water, just to see an angle spring into a straight line by refraction; feeling the electric thrill of a fish not caught but nibbling.

"It must be fine to know how to commune with nature!" said Ramshack. "I wish I hadn't lost all my life in business and knew how to commune a little. Look at these ripple marks in the sand. Just like the stripes scrubbed on a shirt over an ironing board."

But he paused. He amazed himself. Never before had it occurred to him that he had so much poetry in him.

And in the evening when looking at stars, he said:

"Just like the twinkling of bubbles in a frying pancake. Why, that's quite a thought! Like poetry, isn't it?"

But he forgot his admiration for himself, for voices were roaring and growling and grumbling old songs, there in the very old woods, evoking feeling as old as is the feeling that comes with any kind of music when greenness is overhead, and underfoot is the brown of green that has fallen.

The emotion of Ramshack, poet and communicant at the altar of nature, burst from him.

He exclaimed: "This isn't so rotten, is it?"

And Marcy was moved so that he agreed:

"I'm sure I've seen rottener."

The next morning Doc Sordorst had something to say.

Said Doc: "Well, here in a way is one of our rules half broken. You know we agreed that there should be no letters or newspapers sent to camp, so as to keep away from all worries. Still, if anything important should arise, it should be sent through my office. Letter for you, Marcy."

Marcy read the letter and muttered. When Ramshack asked him to go fishing, he muttered again, shamefacedly this time, and would not go fishing.

The letter told him that suit would be brought against Ramshack at nine o'clock that morning. Already it was seven. Telegraph wires were down; only by train could Marcy stop proceedings. Then suit would be surely brought. It seemed a pity.

"I wouldn't wish it for the world!" exclaimed Marcy. "If by a special, whether train or engine, I could reach

town by nine o'clock, I'd do it. There's no way of doing it; I'm hundreds of miles away."

Said Doc Sordorst: "Is it as important as that, Marcy?"

And Marcy, feeling that to sue and annoy that very fine fellow, Ramshack, would be the wickedest act of his life, answered, gloomily:

"It certainly is!"

Then Doc writhed and made a fearful face. He writhed again, and his confession came out:

"Boys, by various little schemes, especially when changing cars, I have fooled you for business reasons of my own. Marcy, that is really Lake Muggins, and you are only twenty miles away!"

Some one grumbled and some one laughed.

"Sir," began old Patterson, "this is very dishonorable——"

But he laughed, and everyone else laughed, for everything is a joke when out camping.

That is, everyone laughed except Marcy. Marcy's short legs were shooting pellets of mud backward. As luck would have it, he caught his train, accomplished his purpose, and by dinner time was back from the city and seated at the rough pine table.

As he was only twenty miles away, to this day Ramshack has never discovered that his wall has anything in common with a certain long-famous tower in Italy.

LOQUACIOUS DEPEW

SOME sixty years ago two ten-year-old boys, who had been fishing in Southern New York, became hungry, and went to a farmer's house to get something to eat. The farmer's wife gave them a bountiful supply of bread and milk, and refused to take any pay for it. One of the boys merely said: "Thank you, ma'am." But the other wiped his mouth on his coat sleeve, bowed, and expressed his gratitude thus:

"To say that you have conferred a great favor upon us, madam, and that we are correspondingly grateful, conveys the idea feebly. Here we were miles from home and suffering from hunger, having caught nothing in the little stream in which we were fishing. You have supplied our wants most generously. Out of the abundance of your larder you have ministered to the wants of two hungry strangers, and with a hospitality rare indeed, in these days of sordid greed, you have refused to accept any remuneration for the same. It is scarcely necessary to assure you, madam, that we shall always hold you in grateful remembrance, and should it be ever in our power to requite the favor you may depend upon our doing so with the liveliest satisfaction. Madam, we thank you."

"Good gracious, little boy," exclaimed the farmer's wife; "what I done for you wasn't worth all that, but I like to hear you talk. You'll be a big man some day."

Her foresight was unerring, says the writer of "America's Successful Statesmen." The boy was Chauncey Mitchell Depew, one of America's most brilliant speakers. The writer of "America's Successful Statesmen" neglected to state, however, whether the exact words of the young Depew were thus saved to posterity through the wonderful memory of the old lady, or whether the other little boy was a shorthand expert, and, therefore, enabled to take down the speech verbatim. As the incident occurred before the coming of the phonograph, it must have been one or the other. We wish we knew which.

THE PRIVATE WAR

Being the Truth About Gordon Traill: His Personal Statement

By Louis Joseph Vance

Author of "Terence O'Rourke, Gentleman Adventurer," "The Test," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Gordon Traill, a wealthy young society man of New York, goes to London with the avowed intention of wooing and winning, if he can, the young and beautiful widow of Sir Henry Venables-Herbert, who, as Miss Julia Leigh, of Richmond, was Traill's old sweetheart. He arrives just as a dense fog has settled over the city, which is the cause of his having a strange adventure through which he is brought into touch with his old friend, Anthony Sevrance; Kurd von Holzborn, a German attaché, who Traill soon learns, is the recently accepted fiancé of Lady Venables-Herbert; and a Russian diplomat named De Netze It soon develops that the last two are engaged in some conspiracy which exposes them to considerable peril, though Traill is not informed as to the nature of it. Traill and Lady Herbert see each other, from a distance, at the opera, and the next morning he receives a note from her asking him to call at a certain time. When he does so, however, he learns that she has suddenly left town. Later he receives a note imploring his assistance, then a telephone message which affords him the clew that she is to be found at Saltacres, a remote estate formerly belonging to Sir Henry. Thither go Traill and Sevrance, but she is not there. While they are debating what to do, an automobile glides up and stops directly before them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MOTORISTS.

FOR the next few seconds I had my hands full, and was unable to clearly comprehend what was taking place. Abruptly, as the automobile came to a halt, I realized that the racket of its motor had frightened our horse into a fit of frenzy.

I saw the brute rearing and pawing the air with its hoofs, showing the whites of its eyes, jumping this way and that between the shafts of the fly, threatening every moment either to overturn the vehicle or to break loose and run away, so leaving us without means of return to the Rainbow at Saltsea Regis.

Such a catastrophe was to be averted at all costs. I sprang to the head of the animal, grabbed the bridle near the bits, and, by main strength and soothing words, managed to calm it into a state of trembling quiescence.

To this result I was aided by one of the occupants of the car, who had the sense or the decency, or both, to still the vibrations of the motor. With the cessation of that sound the horse relaxed and was still, save for its heavy breathings, and I was at liberty to turn to the newcomers.

All of this, however, had taken but a minute or two. When I approached Sevrance again, it was simultaneously with one of the motorists, who had alighted, I observed, leaving two companions in the car.

I hurried forward, urged with strong apprehensions of trouble, imminent and calamitous. To my infinite relief, the man, passing under the glare of the lamp which Thompson, the keeper, still held in the doorway, showed himself an utter stranger to us—at least, to me. And his first words indicated that he

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was unacquainted with my companion, who had not moved from his position by the lodge.

"Pardon, monsieur," the man addressed Sevrance, speaking in English strongly tinged with a foreign accent. "I," he continued, with strained courtesy, "beg to assure you that I am *desolé* to have affrightened your noble animal, ze horse."

He was, then, unmistakably a Frenchman! The knowledge came to us both, combined with the absurdity of his opening remarks, with the effect of an abrupt tumble from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Reviewed in the calm light of afterthought, it is undeniable that we were quite unwarranted in our belief that the approaching car contained my Heart's Desire and the man whom we had come to consider in the light almost of an abductor—Von Holzborn. But we had been so thoroughly expectant of some such event, and it seemed so improbable that any others should choose to scour the downs by night in a motor car at that bleak season of the year, that we had anticipated the event with confidence.

Dashing as the outcome was to our hopes—for they had been hopes, albeit commingled with the gravest apprehensions—neither Sevrance nor I could forbear laughing. This errant Frenchman, bowing and scraping, and fumbling with his goggles and his motoring cap, presented a figure irresistibly comical—no less so than were his words to us.

Sevrance gasped, in time to avert the other's threatened resentment, manifest in the stiffening of his pose: "You are entirely excusable, monsieur. Our noble animal, the horse, is no more than a country plug, and I don't believe he would have run very far if he had broken away."

"Many thanks," minced the fellow. "I am unutterable relieve. You are mos' kind."

He became entangled with the straps of his mask and choked upon some following words; a second later he emerged, bareheaded, smiling and bowing inimitably. A slight, pallid little man he proved, with small eyes, very quick, and an insignificant mustache.

"Permit me," he said, "to introduce myself—Monsieur Adolph Dechaud, of Paris, *en tour* een ze British Isle' wiz *mon ami,* Monsieur Chartier, an' ze chauffeur."

At the mention of his name, Monsieur Chartier piled out of the tonneau and came toward us. Sevrance bit his lip to repress a smile and introduced himself, adding my name. There was a moment or two of general, all-'round gush, and then Dechaud, as he called himself, managed to deliver his questions—Chartier standing by, I remarked, rather silent, and without removing his goggle mask.

It developed that the party, *en tour,* as they would have it, had started out of Lincoln for Great Grimsby, and had lost their way on what they aptly termed "ze downs so ver' horeebile."

Would we, then, be so good as to set them right as to their whereabouts and their route?

We would, willingly. Sevrance pointed out the northern road, giving minute directions. One question that he answered sticks in my mind, because of the significance that later attached unto it.

Dechaud had been giving an exhibition of crass stupidity. I remember wondering at the obstinacy with which he refused to understand Sevrance's directions.

"But," he repeated, several times, "where ar-re we *now?* What is *zis* place?"

To which Sevrance finally made answer, impatiently: "Saltacres, the estate of Lady Venables-Herbert; ten miles north of Saltsea Regis."

"Ah-h, ze Lady Herbert—ze gr-reat Eenglish beauty, I believe? She reside here, in zis country so objectionable altogether?"

That was Dechaud's inquisitive comment. Sevrance told him no, that her ladyship lived in London. I fancied that the Frenchman seemed disappointed, but from then on his understanding improved remarkably, and in

a moment or two more he was back in the car, and, after insisting upon an exchange of cards and compliments, the party struck briskly out into the north.

To tell the truth, it was with some regret that I heard the hum of the motor die upon the night. They had passed on and out of our lives, it seemed, but their interruption had afforded us considerable amusement. The slight incident seemed almost memorable, since it was the only bright, laughable spot in a time of gloomy anxiety.

Sevrance struck a little bargain with the keeper, whereby Thompson promised not to mention seeing us, but, on the other hand, to find a means of apprising us instantly of the arrival of Lady Herbert, or of the receipt from her of any word indicating her arrival.

And so, not five minutes after the departure of the automobile, we were back in the fly, encouraging that noble animal, the plug, to take us home to the Rainbow. It required all of two hours —it may be longer—to make it, however, and the lingering misery of that interminable ride through those unmentionable downs is something that will stick forever in my memory, I'm afraid.

To this day I cannot hear the *plod-plod-plod* of a horse's hoofs at night without again smelling the saline breath of the sea and experiencing a reminiscent shiver, as if again the damp and penetrating chill of that night were numbing my extremities.

We made the inn at about nine, and fell upon a smoking-hot supper like a pair of famished savages. The meal was served in the tap room of the Rainbow, and, as nearly as we could estimate, all the countryside was there to see. They sat around the tables in little, taciturn groups, smoking and drinking from enormous pewter pots while watching us with intense gravity.

I don't suppose that four strangers had ever been at that inn at one and the same time before, that the coincidence assumed in the popular mind the importance of a village event; and for that reason I hardly blamed them. But the combined stares of so many pairs of eyes made me nervous. In particular I resented the attitude of our whilom fellow traveler, the ancient, who sat in a far corner and never once ceased to accord our actions his undivided attention.

Every now and again I would look up, and, as if drawn by magnetic attraction, my gaze would wander to his corner, to encounter the animal-like, curious and steady stare of his small, bright eyes.

I fancied in them something malicious, and called Sevrance's attention to the old fellow; we passed it off with an exchange of banter at the time, but an incident of the later evening invested the man with more importance in our estimation, and we had cause to recall his persistent interest in us.

We had retired to our rooms—small, chilly and damp chambers, scantily furnished and provided with window sashes that rattled like castanets in the sea breeze; situate at the end of a corridor on the first floor.

Sevrance was in my room, occupying the one chair, whereupon he sat tilted back against the wall, glumly chewing a cigar which he was enjoying so little that he had permitted it to go out, and in which he took not even enough interest to relight. Grady was in his master's chamber, unpacking the suit cases. I lay full length upon the bed, smoking and trying to stare the ceiling out of countenance.

Neither of us, by any stretch of the imagination, could be described as in a happy frame of mind. I do not believe a dozen sentences had passed between us from the time of our parting with Thompson, the lodge keeper at Saltacres, and of them not one had borne upon the subject which was filling our minds almost to the point of obsession.

I remember that I was thinking that we had best instruct Grady to prepare for an early departure for London the following morning, since there could be no profit in a continued stay in Saltsea. It was quite apparent, as I viewed the matter, that Von Holzborn had succeeded in throwing us completely off the scent, and I felt gloomily con-

vinced that by that time the blackguard had accomplished his end—had run off with Julia and persuaded her into an unconventional marriage.

Sevrance's opening remark, which came presently, was right in line with this dour reverie. He spoke abruptly, startling me with the appropriateness of his words to my thoughts.

"I suppose," he said, "that you are for Portsmouth next?"

"Portsmouth?" I turned to look at him. "I'd take the first train if I imagined for a minute that there was anything to be gained. As it is, we can consider ourselves cutely hoodwinked, and it is my opinion that we had best drop the matter—put it out of our lives, as we must—Julia."

"You may do so if you wish," he said, shortly. "I am not so complacent in defeat. In fact, I'll not acknowledge that I am beaten until we have more than circumstantial evidence to prove it. I was going to suggest that you, if you insisted, might go to Portsmouth."

"But you?"

"I'll stay. Her ladyship did not trouble to send you that note for no purpose—nor, I venture to suggest, did she telephone her dressmaker without a motive."

"Then you think we had better stay?"

"Assuredly." He arose, walked the length of the room and sat down, wearing an odd expression of attentiveness which I failed to understand. "She wrote," he continued, softly—indeed, almost whispering: "'Gordon, I need you.' She said, 'Saltacres'—you're sure of that?"

"Positive."

"Very well, then," he said, loudly. "We'll start back to-morrow."

"What!" I gasped.

But when I looked toward him he was not in the chair. I saw him, out of the tail of my eye, making stealthily, on tiptoe, for the door. In another instant he had it open.

Startled, I sat up on the edge of the bed. I heard a slight cry of protest, a shuffle of feet—and the door slammed loudly, shutting in Sevrance with our aged and inquisitive fellow guest of the Rainbow.

It was all consummated so swiftly that I was still blinking with amazement when I saw Sevrance release the arm which he had been grasping, and, with the quickness of thought, turn the key in the lock. The ancient appeared no less surprised than I; he stood quaking with the weakness of age, rheumy eyes glittering beneath the steely thatch of his brows, his pendulous lower lip sagging.

Sevrance turned upon him, with a menacing mien. "Now, sir," he demanded, "you'll perhaps explain!"

"I—I——" stammered the ancient. "You will excuse an old man, gentlemen——"

"Excuses be damned!" said Sevrance, tersely. "You tell us why you were listening at the door."

I fancied him a trifle rough—more so than the circumstances seemed to call for. The man was trembling, palpably confused and bewildered, aged hands a-quiver—the embodiment of senile distress.

"A mistake!" he protested, his old voice quavering. "I was seeking my room, sir, and mistook the door. You surely will excuse a simple error."

He eyed the two of us anxiously, with quick, searching glances.

"I can assure you," he continued, more easily, "that I did not intend to listen——"

"But you did!" Sevrance asserted, unyielding.

I thought it time to interfere. "Look here, Tony," I protested; "don't be quite so hard on him. Surely you can understand that mistakes will happen. You'd best apologize and unlock that door."

"I'll attend to this," said Sevrance, rudely. "You——" He paused; the darkness of his stern expression was lightened by his winning smile. "But you are right," he conceded, amiably.

"My friend," he added, turning the key in the lock and opening the door, "mistakes will happen, as Mr. Traill insists. You, then, will be as lenient

with mine as you expect me to be with yours, I trust. I bid you a very good-evening. Good-night, sir, good-night. But don't err again, I counsel you."

The ancient's face flushed darkly red under the lash of Sevrance's irony. He straightened himself up angrily, and I anticipated a scathing reply. But, to the contrary, he seemed to change his mind, and, with a slight inclination of his head, left the room.

I prepared to rebuke Sevrance for his lack of consideration, and was framing a top-loftical homily for his edification as he turned in and again secured the door.

"It seems to me——" I began; but Grady interrupted me. He had darted through the connecting doorway from Sevrance's room, and stood, beaming with delight, a boot in either hand.

"Shure," he commended his master, forgetting, for the time, his place, "'twas th' good dose ye gave the ould sinner, Mr. Sivrance, sor. Faith, an' 'twas meself that was susphectin' him of some divvlemint, iver sinst ye lift this afthernoon, sor."

I changed my mind about that little speech on a man's duty of respect to his elders, and challenged the valet:

"How's that, Grady?"

"Shure, thin," he said, warmly, "an' didn't I see him with the two eyes of me, talkin' about your honors to some min in an autymobile. Faith, an' I did that."

"Go on. Tell us about it," Sevrance encouraged him. "How did it happen?"

"'Twas the matther av an hour, or an hour an' a half, or mebbe two hours, sor, afther ye had set off, whin the divvle waggon sthopped in frint av here, and wan of the min in it got out to ask his way, sor. Thot ould rapscallion was poking around in the street for no reason at all, at all, that meself could see, an' th' minute he sees the machine stop he runs up and begins to jabber in Frinch wid th' payple in it. Not knowin' th' language, 'twas meself that understood nothin' at all, but not once but twice did I hear him mintion the two names of ye."

"The deuce you say!" said Sevrance, frowning.

"Faith, yiss. And afther some more talk the car-r wint off like a flash, an' he come into the house, grinnin' to himself like a domned ould—beggin' your honors' pardons——"

"How many men in the motor, Grady?" I asked.

"Three, sor."

"Very well, Grady. Thank you very much. Run along, now," Sevrance dismissed him.

"What do you make of that?" I demanded, eagerly.

Sevrance shook his head dubiously. "I'm afraid to guess," he said, slowly.

"You think—Von Holzborn——"

"Oh, undoubtedly. Else why should our name be passed to those men? Why, since they must have known their way, having asked it here—did they stop at the lodge? Why did they so persistently demand the name of the place, and dance about us until they had the light in our faces, and at their own backs?"

He thrust his hands in his pockets, glowering at me as though I had been Von Holzborn myself.

"Why did this old duffer sneak at the door? Oh, I was right there! And why is he playing a part—masquerading, as it were? Gordon, I tell you that he's not half his apparent age. He acted well, I grant you, but the muscles of the arm that I clutched, when I dragged him inside, were as heavy as mine, and as hard as steel—the muscles of a man in the prime of his life. Do you explain that in any way—other than that he is Von Holzborn's spy, set upon us for God knows what hellish end?"

I said something, dolefully, in the negative. In truth, I was aghast at this abrupt development. "Why?" I asked.

"Don't ask that of me, Gordon; I'd give my hand to know. But, by Heaven, this business begins to frighten me! Von Holzborn and De Netze are playing a game a thousandfold more damnable than you and I have guessed. Here are three men in his pay already,

assembling in the neighborhood of Saltacres; and who can say how many more may be on the way?"

His voice took on a savage note. "You mark my prophecy, Traill, there's something brewing of more than ordinary devilishness. And to think," he cried, despairingly, "that they've involved that girl in it!"

"It's bad enough," I growled; "don't pile on the agony, Tony."

"Bad enough! It's maddening! Now, shall we take train for London in the morning?"

"You can, if you wish."

"Don't be a silly ass. Grady!"

"Yiss, sor." The man appeared promptly.

"Grady," said Sevrance, "Mr. Traill and I have decided to stay here for perhaps a month. We suspect that there will be some trouble—involving Lady Herbert. You can keep a still tongue in your head?"

"Shure I can, yer honor!"

"Very well. See that you do. I presume you'd prefer to go back and wait for me in London? You can make your preparations to leave to-morrow, if you wish."

Grady's broad Irish countenance became as long and doleful-looking as though he had been summarily dismissed from service.

"Aw, yer honor," begged he. "'Tis thriftin' wid me, ye are. Shure, an' ye don't intind to pack me off whin there's a bit av fun in soight? Ah! faith, 'tis meself thot won't go, thin—no, not if ye give me notice!"

He stood, in open rebellion, shaking his head at his master with heartbroken defiance.

"It's kicks I'll be giving ye," Sevrance mimicked him, sourly. "Do you mean that you want to stay and take your share of the danger—if there is any?"

"Shure an' I do thot!"

"Very well, then, stay—confound you! I suppose I'll have to pay you double. Get out, now, and don't remind me of your existence until morning. And, Grady!"

The man paused with his hand on the doorknob, looking at us with a face glowing with excitement.

"Grady," continued Sevrance, "you prepare to run down to Lincoln on the first train to-morrow. I want you to purchase us a brace of revolvers—the finest you can find."

"Only two, yer honor?" protested Grady, plaintively.

"Well, three, then," Sevrance conceded. "And if you shoot yourself, your blood be upon your worthless head! Get out!"

Grady vanished.

"He's a good boy," I mused, aloud. "After all, whatever befalls, we're three against them!"

Sevrance grunted disgustedly.

"Against how many?" he demanded, bitterly. "Against what? What are we preparing to fight? The invisible?"

"We'll find it tangible enough before a great while," I ventured to predict.

CHAPTER X.

THE LANDING.

I lay awake far into the small hours of that night, oppressed by a burden of anxieties for the welfare of the woman whom I loved; and, in consequence, I overslept, waking late in the following forenoon.

Sevrance, I discovered, had wakened early and had left the Rainbow shortly after breakfast, making, apparently, for the downs. I surmised that he was off to indulge in the reckless dissipation of a long walk, perhaps with Saltacres lodge for an objective point.

Grady, likewise, was not in evidence; it was an easy matter to deduce that he was obeying his instructions of the preceding night, and was off for Lincoln to buy us an arsenal.

I stepped out of the tap room, after breakfasting, into a gusty morning. A keen wind—"blowing up for a gale," I overheard one characterize it—whipped in and out among the cottages of Saltsea Regis, blowing folk headlong down the winding street, banging shutters, greedy for the breath of one's body.

I was eager to button my coat against its searching chill, and set off for a saunter down the street toward the railway terminal—a progress that, to be frank, resembled more a struggle against an invisible but strong and agile opponent, rather than a "saunter."

A brisk, headlong sea had kicked up during the night; eastward, as far as my sight served, the ocean was a welter of white caps, sparkling like diamond dust in the rays of a brilliant, winter sun.

In the cove the fishing craft were dragging at their moorings, dancing fantastically; the majority of the populace seemed to have assembled by the wharves, where they stood shaking sage heads at the audacity of certain dauntless souls who had hoisted sail upon their vessels and were obstinately beating out to windward.

Masses of high-piled clouds, of a somber hue, swinging steadily out of the east, made both land and sea a wide and restless patchwork of light and shadow; and, to my mind, justified the ominous predictions of the weather-wise. There would be a "blow" to contend with ere night, or all signs failed.

In a twinkling I discovered myself quite cheerful, with all the fears and misgivings and distempers of the past few days blown right out of me by the clean, crisp breath of the morning. I bent with determination to the wind and took a deal of pleasure from its buffetings.

Nevertheless, I was glad enough, after half an hour of it, to dodge into a little shop for a quiet breathing spell. By way of an excuse, I bargained for a pair of second-hand binoculars—the shop was a litter with nautical miscellany—and presently, with my purchase pocketed, put back to the Rainbow, already the possessor of an ambitious appetite.

For lunch, however, I concluded to wait until Sevrance returned; and so I locked myself in my room and took to focusing the distances of the North Sea with the glasses. They proved excellent of their kind, and I lost an hour or more watching the endless battle of the fishing smacks with the wind and waters.

Sevrance himself interrupted me, blustering into the room, redolent of the sweet, cold air of the downs, red as to his cheeks and with snapping eyes—for all the world like a whiff of the gale itself. He flung across to my window, slapping me on the shoulder with a brief, exultant laugh—and stopped stock-still, with wondering eyes.

"The deuce!" he cried, breathlessly. "How did you learn——"

"Learn what?" I asked, blankly.

"Enough to get those glasses," he said. "They've been in my mind ever since—— By Jove! there's telepathy for you!"

"If you'll moderate a trifle," I suggested, "and try to act like a gentle spring zephyr instead of a brute of a March blow—perhaps you'll become a bit more coherent."

"Perhaps," he agreed, sobering. "But, you know, it *is* a coincidence. Tell me, how did you get the glasses? Landlord, or——"

"I bought 'em," I interrupted.

"I knew it! Well, I've been thinking of buying a pair ever since I had word with Thompson. Gordon, old chap," he cried, slapping me on the shoulder again, and with a heartiness that made me wince, "we're not on a false trail, after all. Thompson met me halfway this morning, big with news."

He paused, tantalizingly, nor continued until I threatened to do him a hurt. Then:

"Saltacres is being prepared for the reception of its chatelaine," he declared. "Thompson says that the housekeeper got a wire this morning, dated from Portsmouth, to the effect that Lady Herbert *and guests* would arrive on the *Myosotis* to-day or to-morrow. We have only, then, to wait and——"

"Watch." I took the word out of his mouth, and suited my action to it, putting the binoculars immediately to my eyes and sweeping the circle of the horizon.

"It's hardly to be expected that they would show up so soon," he advised

me. "Still, there's a chance—and we must not fail to see the yacht. One of us—you or I, or Grady—must stand watch with the glasses every hour of the day, until she arrives."

"You know the vessel from any other?" I doubted.

"Man, I was her passenger for six weeks in the Mediterranean, the winter before Sir Henry's death; I know her like the palm of my hand."

"But, I——"

"You'll know her by the fact that she's a yacht; the very appearance of such a vessel off shore here at this time of the year would be sufficient evidence to identify the *Myosotis*. I can inform you that the North Sea's not popular for pleasure yachting trips at this season of the year. There is too much chance of such a storm as seems to threaten now. I shouldn't like to be out there this night."

He pointed to the lowering distances, and as he spoke a sprinkle of rain and hail rattled upon the window pane. In the east the sky had become sullen and lowering, and the horizon presently vanished in a shroud of haze. Heavy gusts of wind set the casements a-shiver, and at times the very inn itself seemed to rock upon its foundations.

Frowning, Sevrance took the glasses, but he no more than had them to his eyes than the slate-colored waste of waters was obscured by a curtain of rain so heavy as to seem almost opaque. The thunder of its fall upon the tavern roof became deafening, and its myriad lashes whipped the nearer waters till they seemed to boil, steaming. Out of this came the gale, full-winged, in all the strength of its fury, screaming terrifically, driving the rain before it at an acute angle, well-nigh horizontal.

"God help those a-sea this day and night!" said Sevrance, fervently, putting down the binoculars.

"But the *Myosotis?*" I asked, anxiously. "Will she be out there?"

"It depends upon the time of her start," he told me. "This ship's stanch and safe, equipped with turbine engines; she has a record of over twenty knots. With favoring conditions, the run from Portsmouth should not take a full twenty-four hours. But you can't tell.

"You can make your mind easy, however," he added; "no one in his senses would attempt a landing to-night. If the *Myosotis* is off coast now, she'll stand off until the sea has gone down. Should the gale subside during the night, they might make a landing late to-morrow afternoon. We'll get a rest and possess our souls with patience."

We did both, so far as lay within our ability. Toward evening Grady staggered in, drenched to the skin and chilled to the bone, with, he protested, no more than a mouthful of wind in the body of him.

He had, however, been successful in his mission, and produced, in proof thereof, three shiny, able-bodied revolvers, Colts, I believe, and Sevrance pronounced them forty-fours. In this connection I may as well make a clean breast of it and confess that my acquaintance with firearms, up to that time, was not extensive. I had never been much of a hunter, and beyond knowing that it was inadvisable to look down the barrel of an unloaded weapon, knew but little of guns—and cared less.

For which reason I regarded these with distrust, which I took no pains to conceal from Sevrance; I told him that I was afraid I might hurt somebody besides myself. But he was not disposed for badinage, and silenced me with the dry observation that that was the purpose for which revolvers were manufactured.

The howling of the gale kept me awake and listening for some hours of the night, but toward midnight it seemed to moderate, and I dropped off to sleep, waking to find that the wind had gone down to a mere whisper of breeze, and that the temperature had risen perceptibly.

To seaward, however, there was fog; and, before breakfast had been served in our rooms, this thickened and spread inland—a dense white and dripping blanket of moisture, as impenetrable as had been its dirtier London brother, which I had reason to remember.

Merely because there was nothing else

to do, we kept to our rooms, in a depressed and uncommunicative mood, speaking to one another but infrequently. Each, for that matter, knew what the other was thinking about, and the full extent of his knowledge on the subject; there was no call for words wherewith to communicate our thoughts.

The forenoon wore away monotonously; I recall no hours in all my life that seemed so long, dead and unprofitable. I tried to sleep, but found myself staring wide-eyed at the wall paper, counting the steady pounding of Sevrance's heels as he paced the floor. Grady, in the other room, attempted a cheerful whistle, but it trailed off into a dirgelike march, which Sevrance had to silence with a threat.

Toward noon, and for the first time since breakfast, Sevrance spoke.

"I can't stand this any longer," he announced. "I'm going out."

"Where?" I asked, sitting up.

"You can guess," he said, curtly. "I'll go mad if I have to endure this uncertainty a moment longer."

"You think, then——"

"The surf is going down; they may send a boat ashore at any time now, if they can make their bearings. The *Myosotis* must be somewhere in the offing by now, and it's certain that they will land as soon as the fog lifts—at all events. So I'm off. Are you coming?"

"In two shakes."

I was glad enough for the excuse, willing even to contemplate a fruitless drive through those infernal downs for the sake of being conscious that I was doing something, going somewhere.

Sevrance, however, dashed my hopes.

"It's a walk," he told me, decisively; "that or nothing."

"Why?"

"Because of our ancient friend, Von Holzborn's spy. There's no need that he should suspect our destination, and he won't unless we order the fly. We can slip away quietly, and leave no one the wiser. Grady, you get ready."

I demurred, but gave in when he quashed my objection that we would lose ourselves on the downs, in the sea turn, without the carriage.

"No danger," he said, "if we are careful to stick to the road. The way is plain, and you can't stray off without knowing it at once."

As it turned out, we were fated for once to make a move without being observed by the aged and inquisitive person; he was invisible when we descended the stairs, nor did he put in an appearance before we were out of the front door and lost to the house in the folds of that friendly mist.

Once there, indeed, a prey to misgivings though I was, I had no choice but to go ahead and trust to Sevrance's bump of locality. We might have been going 'most anywhere, so far as I could determine; the road of which he had been so confident was doubtless under our feet the whole of the way, but I would not have cared to risk a bet on that probability; I am free to admit my inability to judge of the lay of the land by the feel of it beneath my boot heels.

For that matter I had enough to occupy me with the task of keeping in touch with my companions; I walked in the middle of the trio, Sevrance and Grady looming on either hand like gigantic ghosts. Even when one spoke, his words sounded as though muffled, pressed back into his throat by the weight of the fog; whose heavy hand seemed to have smoothed and soothed the troubled sea, whose voice came to us now and again, according—I suppose—to our propinquity to the beach, in prolonged and sonorous phrases, at times almost murmurous.

Otherwise there was a great and desolate silence that weighed heavily upon my spirits; it was as if the wide world lay lifeless, and swathed in white grave clothes, already entombed in the womb of silence.

For possibly an hour and a half we progressed thus, with few words, each, I fancy, being somewhat awed and impressed with the profundity of that isolation which the fog passively forced upon us, with a sense of remote detachment from all living things and material matters. And then, abruptly, a hoarse

and guttural bellow seemed to sound at our very feet and to shake the very wall of the fog itself.

I started, catching at Sevrance's arm; whereupon he laughed shortly, and said: "Listen." I obeyed, and my ears were rewarded with a repetition of the sound, this time a distant chuckle.

"What is that?" I demanded.

"Fog horn," Sevrance told me. "There's a light somewhere north of Saltacres, and we are just getting near enough to hear the signal."

"Whereabouts do you place us, then?" I asked.

"Halfway," he estimated; "we should be near the beach, where the road skirts it, if I'm not mistaken."

He was, in fact, right; a few steps more brought us out into the sandy soil, where the growl of the surf was more loud and insistent than it had sounded at any time since we started.

It was here that we were favored with our first gleam of promise, to hearten us with the knowledge that this long and blindfold tramp was not without an end.

We had traversed, I figure, some hundred yards of the damp and dragging sand of the beach, when a sudden exclamation from Grady induced me, involuntarily, to glance toward him.

To my amazement I saw him quite clearly; nought stood between us but clear air. He had turned his back and was pointing seaward. An instant later I understood that we were the debtors of a curious phenomenon; the fog seemed to have parted, rolling aside for our especial benefit; or, more clearly, I felt as though we had unwittingly walked out into a wide and deep and long chasm between the walls of vapor. On either side the dead, white walls reared, tremulous; but ahead, as we stood looking out to sea, there extended a mile-long rift of clear air; and at its further end we could see, as though we looked down an endless corridor, floored with deep blue, a single vessel.

She was heading inshore, at quarter speed, perhaps; a glistening, snow-white ship of considerable burden, modeled upon fine and swelling lines, with two graceful and tapering masts, two funnels amidships vomiting inky smoke.

The glasses were in my coat pocket; I was reaching for them, with my heart in my mouth, hoping against hope, when Sevrance himself snatched them.

When I turned he was adjusting them with feverish haste, his face pale with excitement; he had not an instant to lose, for already, as we looked, the yacht had poked her nose into the fog bank and was gradually disappearing from our view.

The broken, bronchial cough of the fog signal at the distant lighthouse saluted her, and with wonderful distinctness the sonorous response of her whistle came to us. A second later she vanished, and Sevrance dropped the binoculars with an exclamation of irritation.

"Well?" I asked, impatiently, trying to read his face.

"The *Myosotis*," he said, his voice unsteady, "or I'm a sinner!"

"The identification should be complete, then," I returned, with a sigh of relief.

Almost at once the cloudy walls began to close; the vista of blue water narrowed swiftly; within a little moment it was gone, leaving us with an impression of the dreamlike unreality of the incident. But still we were only too glad to credit the evidence of our senses, and we turned and pressed on with hearts that were wonderfully brightened.

I, for one, in my blindness, fancied that the end of my quest was in sight, that within an hour or two, at most, we would have met the landing party—and that consummated, all thenceforward was certain to be well with the world. Already I was deprecating Von Holzborn's part, deluding myself into a belief that my mere presence by my dear one's side was all that would prove necessary to set her affairs to rights—and give me my Heart's Desire.

A little later Sevrance caught me by the arm, and I, in my turn, stretched forth a hand to detain Grady.

"I've a suggestion," said Sevrance; "we should keep to the shore. By fol-

lowing that we cannot go astray; we have only to keep on until we reach the Saltacres limits. The yacht anchorage and the boat landing are only a bit beyond. What do you say? It will save us a mile or so of walking," he urged.

"By all means," I agreed; and we turned back.

We had left the shore but a few paces behind, and it was an easy matter to retrace our steps and to turn again northward along the beach—by which route, indeed, we made more rapid progress, owing to the firmer foothold which the sodden sands afforded.

We pressed on hurriedly, therefore, at times running, but for the most part at a swinging walk, Sevrance in advance and Grady and I following at a slight distance, guiding ourselves by the trail of his footprints in the sands.

It was a matter of twenty minutes or so afterward that we ran suddenly into Sevrance, who was standing in an attitude of attention, and in a low tone warned us to be still and to listen. We obeyed—I considerably at a loss; for I was convinced that we could not yet have crossed the boundaries of Saltacres.

Nor had we. As we stood, holding our breath and listening with an intentness commanded by Sevrance's own similar pose, there came to us, brokenly, the hum of a motor car, off somewhere in the hills to the left.

I caught Sevrance's eye, with a nod, to show him that I comprehended now what had brought him up short in that place. He nodded back, significantly.

The vibrating drone of the powerful engines filled all the air, punctuated by short and dry coughs from the escape pipe—the whole indicating plainly that the car was running at a very low rate of speed; cautiously, no doubt, because of the fog. It seemed rank folly to me—the notion of taking a car out in such weather; and I could only account for its presence on one supposition.

"Do you suppose *they* know, too?" I whispered to Sevrance.

"Von Holzborn would keep them pretty accurately advised," he returned, in the same manner. "Fortunately we have the advantage of having seen the yacht so near inshore; we shall beat them, by a few moments at worst."

It was odd that we should both have been so sure that the very moment we appeared upon the scene the situation would resolve itself into one of such absolute security for Lady Herbert. I remember thinking of it at the time, and commenting to myself that we were somewhat oversanguine.

"Come on," said Sevrance, impatiently. "Only—don't make any more noise than you can help."

He was off instantly, a misty shadow fleeting silently through the mists, with Grady and myself tagging stubbornly at his heels. The sound of the motor presently died, leaving an aching void, periodically split by the fog horn, and accentuated by the voice of the sea.

It was considerably later that we were compelled to scale the face of a ragged chalk bluff, whence onward we progressed more gingerly at the very verge of one of the characteristic low, abrupt cliffs of the region. Below us the sea growled menacingly as it gnawed at the rocks. Sevrance kept the lead, but held more close to us, pausing now and then to warn us of the nature of the path ahead, whereof he seemed to retain a very vivid recollection, from his former visits to Saltacres.

It now drew on toward evening—a fact made evident by a sharper tinge of chill in the air, and a perceptible darkening of the vague, distorted shadows which we passed without knowing what caused them. Our constant exercise, however, was keeping us warm, and one could not but reflect that the darkness of night could hold no terrors for those who had penetrated the depths of that blinding fog.

But the way began to seem interminable, and I became sensible of fatigue. Growing more impatient, I sprang ahead and caught up with Sevrance, who at once stopped.

"Well?" he said.

Grady joining us at that moment, I put the question: Would we ever ar-

rive at the landing? To which Sevrance replied by a doubtful shake of the head.

"This cursed fog!" he said, in an undertone, which was, nevertheless, vindictive enough. "And night coming on, too!"

"It's discouraging enough," I sympathized. "Where do you fancy we are?"

"I don't," he said. "To my way of thinking we should have passed the spot some time ago; there was, and should be now, a beaten path, running down to the cliff's edge, a railing and a flight of stairs to the beach below, and it's that I've been looking for. By mischance I have missed it, but——"

"What's thot?" Grady demanded, sharply.

"What?" we both inquired, turning upon him.

"Listen, thin," he said. "Faith, I thought I heard a whistle, your honors."

As if to credit his interruption, there sounded, at that moment, a sharp and clear and shrill whistle, apparently from some point out over the waters.

"The *Myosotis!*" cried Sevrance, clutching my arm. "They've drifted in by dead reckoning, going upon the voice of that lighthouse horn."

I raised my hand, gesturing for silence, just as the tinkle of a bell floated in; thereafter, for a time, we heard quite distinctly the dull clamor of the engines, the jangling of bells and the voice of a man—presumably a sailor in the bows—calling out a series of nautical phrases which I have forgotten. Sevrance said that he was taking soundings.

"They're standing close in," he advised us, "but there's little danger, and deep water almost to the edge of the beach. They'll discover their mistake before long and draw off to anchor."

The event proved the accuracy of his deductions, for, within the next few minutes, the sound gradually receded until the voice of the man with the lead was almost indistinguishable, and the noise of the engines stilled to a murmur.

Shortly afterward the whistle sang again, and we heard the clangor of steel chains running through hawse holes. They were anchoring. Both Sevrance and I drew a deep breath of relief. It remained for us only to locate the head of the landing stairway and wait for the party from the ship.

We spent half an hour or so in a fruitless search, and then the twilight deepened into a purple dusk, and we were forced to desist for fear of making a misstep in the darkness and falling over the edge of the cliff. Wretchedly enough—hungry, weary, cold and wet—we huddled together in the shelter of a spreading tree and composed ourselves to wait.

It proved trying to the utmost of our patience. For a long time there was no sound from seaward. For all indications to the contrary the *Myosotis* might have been a mere figment of our imaginations—or have gone down, suddenly, without a sound, swallowed by the sea as by the fog.

With the final stage of darkness, however, when there remained to us no more than a mere glimmer of light, there came a most welcome change in the weather, inaugurated by the touch of a breath of air upon our cheeks.

Sevrance wet his finger and held it up. "A land breeze," he announced; "if it holds, or freshens, we'll have a clear night. That may be what they are anticipating out there. In fact, I shouldn't care to cut loose from the vessel in a boat and run up and down the coast, looking for a landing, in this infernal——"

He broke off with a cry of delight; for already the breeze was waxing, the folds of mist about us trembling and wavering under its assault.

"Ten minutes of this," he prophesied, "and we'll——"

Even then the fog lifted, rolling back from the face of the earth like a wall of snow, slowly but resistlessly blown out to sea by that thrice blessed wind.

"Praises be!" Grady gave thanks fervently.

Sevrance silenced him with a word, however, and we stood quietly watching the panorama of land and sea that unfolded to our eyes.

Above there was a gloomy sky, obscured by gigantic and flying masses of cloud, between which the high stars glinted and twinkled. A pale and momentarily fading light in the west helped us to locate ourselves.

Before us, not twenty paces distant, the summit of the cliff ran, a ragged line broken by the crouching masses of shrubs and undergrowth. A bit to the left the rectangular outlines of the stairway and landing were vaguely visible. Behind us lay a confused mass of shadows, masking the park of Saltacres.

Ahead, however, the mists rolled sullenly back, grudgingly disclosing more and more of the heaving waters. I made out, gradually, the looming bulks of two headlands, inclosing a little bay-like anchorage with a broad mouth open to the sea. On the northernmost end of the irregular semicircle, some two miles distant, the lighthouse stood, ringed with a halo of fire.

Presently the receding fog bank gave up—to us—its chiefest treasure: the picture of the *Myosotis,* riding peacefully at anchor, ablaze with lights from stem to stern. And it was in my mind, as I saw it then, practically for the first time, that I had rarely seen so graceful a vessel.

I thought of the binoculars, and put them to use, watching her for several minutes; and as I looked there was a stir and bustle aboard, accompanied by blasts of the boatswain's whistle, and I saw a boat swung out upon the davits and lowered.

Simultaneously a gangway was rigged out, and, when it was completed, I could distinguish dimly a number of persons clustered on deck, about its head. A number of seamen, apparently, ran down and stationed themselves in the seats; I saw the flash of the upraised oars in the light from adjacent portholes. And shortly after four persons negotiated the descent—two men and two women.

Silently I handed the glasses to Sevrance, conscious of the warm flush that was coloring my face, and grateful for the darkness that hid it from critical eyes. My heart was misbehaving sadly, too, and I experienced some trouble with my thoughts, which had escaped control; I had but one vision clearly before my eyes, and that was of a woman in a gown of glistening black, with bare arms and shoulders of a perfect pallor and hair of the hue of a sun-drenched wheat field; a perfect type of loveliness, bewitchingly exotic, in an opera box.

"They're giving way," whispered Sevrance, returning the glasses to his eyes after a brief rest. "We'd best stay here until they're up the stairway. To be successful, our appearance should be a decided surprise—to Von Holzborn and De Netze, at least."

He laughed softly, putting a warning hand upon my arm. "Be careful," he said, "and don't speak above a whisper. One of Von Holzborn's Gallic allies may be near, and we don't wish for any unpleasantness until the proper time comes."

"Very well," I agreed, lapsing into blissful anticipations.

Ten seconds later I felt Grady's hand upon my shoulder and came out of my dreams with a start. "What is it?" I whispered.

"Whist!" cautioned the man, sibilantly. "Faith, an' I dunno pwhat ut is, sor, but 'tis meself thot's convinced there be others waitin' about us, sir, and ye had bist take this and kape ut convanyunt."

He pressed the butt of the revolver into my hand. "I tuk thought to bring ut wid me, sor," he explained, "thinkin' ut might come in handy. Pass ut along to Misther Sivrince, sor, if ye plaze, an' take this other."

I touched Sevrance's elbow and communicated Grady's fears, at the same time giving him the weapon. My own, with a shudder of aversion, I pocketed, mentally registering a vow that no power on earth could induce me to point it at a brother man and pull the trigger.

Sevrance put the binoculars away and silently worked himself behind me until he was in a position to converse with Grady without raising his voice.

"What did you hear?"

"Divvle a sound, beggin' your honor's pardon, sor," said Grady, quickly, "but 'twas in me mind that I saw a shadow move from wan three to another, a bit back, and this past minute I'd have tuk me oath thot it happined ag'in. 'Tis as well to be prephared, sor."

"Very well. Keep your eyes open," Sevrance instructed him. "Nerves," he commented, guardedly, in my ear. "There's not a soul about—I'd swear. But we'd best not bank on it."

"Why should Von Holzborn's allies hide?" I asked, doubtingly.

"God knows. Why are matters in the shape they are?" he cross-questioned. "There's no accounting for the unaccountable. Myself, I'll look for the worst where the Prussian and the Russian are concerned. It may be that some fresh phase of their villainy is about to be shown."

"Rot!" I jeered. Still, I was somewhat impressed.

By now the boat had passed into the shadow of the cliff and we could no longer watch its shoreward progress; on the other hand, the splashing of the oars and the creaking of oar locks were clearly audible. Now and again I heard, or thought I heard, a voice raised in words of command. Somewhat later there floated up to us a sudden confusion of shouts and the grating of iron upon the shingle of the beach below. They were running the boat up out of the surf.

Every muscle in my body seemed to stiffen to tenseness; I gazed with all my soul at the top of the stairway, where I should first see the woman of my dreams. Sevrance and Grady, at my side, made no sound, and otherwise, for a space, there was nothing to be heard but the breeze in the naked branches of the trees and the long crashing of the surf.

Then I heard a voice, distinctly—Von Holzborn's. What he said I do not know, but the intonation was his, unmistakably—the quiet, assured, insinuating laugh that grated upon my nerves like the screech of a pencil on a slate.

His was the first figure that I saw, clearly silhouetted against the flying cloud wrack; the precision of his movements, the set of his head, the military habit of his broad shoulders made him a marked man, not to be confused with any other. He bent low from the top landing, giving a hand to assist the woman who followed him; and when I realized that his hand was touching the hand of my Heart's Desire, I thought guiltily of the weapon resting ready to my hand in the side pocket of my coat. For I realized very poignantly that I hated him with all my heart, and all my soul, and all my strength, and that I would have shot him without compunction—indeed, with all the good will in the world.

But the temptation passed with the sight of the woman. He helped her gallantly, and in a second she stood beside him, breathing heavily.

My heart leaped, recognizing its mistress. She wore a long cloak of some dark stuff, which enveloped her from head to heels, yet might not hide the grace and beauty that marked her every step and gesture. In its hood, as the pale starlight fell across her face, she looked very young, and sweet, and girlish, and innocent—almost childish—and very, very weary and distressed.

She was gazing intently into Von Holzborn's face, for some reason; he bent deferentially and said something in an undertone. At once she seemed to comprehend that he was retaining his grasp of her fingers, and took them from him quickly, stepping aside and away from him without a word. I think he laughed slightly and insolently, as a man confident of his conquest.

Behind them the head and shoulders of a second woman—supposedly Mrs. Morchester—appeared above the landing. She came up quickly and with the spring of youth in her movements, giving Von Holzborn a laughing word as he released her hand.

De Netze followed, his slight figure and the elegance of his bearing identifying him immediately. He was carrying a stick under his arm, which he

whipped out briskly and put his weight upon, seeming to need the support.

"At last!" he said—or, rather, gasped at Von Holzborn. His words rang clear, flawless, crisp, like newly coined metal, as I remembered it.

The Prussian grunted shortly.

"At last," he agreed; "you have a disgustingly selfish care for your carcass, De Netze. So long as you have its safety to consider, you are dead to all else."

"Generous man!" commented the Russian with bland but biting sarcasm. "Von Holzborn, generous, astute, brave, affable and—unselfish! *Mes compliments, monsieur.*"

"Oh, come," said the German. "We can't waste time. You're satisfied now, I gather; the main consideration of your personal safety is assured. Madame, will you take my——"

He turned toward Lady Herbert, crooking a respectful elbow, yet with a certain air of command. I fancied that she seemed to hesitate, to draw away. The passage was over within so brief an instant that I could not be sure; for, even as they stood there, she hesitant, he with his sentence unfinished, a cry of warning from De Netze settled the matter.

The Russian, who had advanced a couple of yards from the landing, came to a halt a few paces ahead of the rest of the party. I saw him throw his head back sharply, with a click of the teeth; at the same time, and with a single, alert gesture, he swung his cane before him, grasping it near the head with his left hand. There was a shrill shiver of sound, and a yard of steel gleamed where the stick had been.

But, quickly though he had acted—warned in the first instance by I know not what instinct—he was yet mortally slow.

Confusedly I was aware of two or three short and sharp cries issuing from the heart of a black thicket some twenty yards from our little party, but within a few feet of De Netze. Simultaneously there was a rush of feet, and I saw a shadowy form dart from the brush and fasten itself upon the Russian—moving with the celerity and with something of the ruthless ferocity of an animal. Indeed, aside from its bulk, judging alone by the swiftness of the attack and the panther-like sureness of its spring, the thing might well have been a wild cat.

De Netze cried aloud, staggering, borne back by the impetus of the assault. With incredible address he shortened his hold upon the sword-cane and used it as a poniard; I saw his white hand rise and fall twice, burying the slim blade in the back of the assassin. The man choked—a dreadful, gurgling sound—and abruptly fell away, dropping, at length, a limp and ghastly shape upon the frozen ground.

But hard upon his heels came others—four crouching shadows hardly less implacably intent than their fellow. Two made for De Netze, the others darting toward Von Holzborn.

The Russian, reeling, with his head drooping forward between his shoulders, seeming about to fall, rallied astonishingly. He brought his heels together, jerked up his chin, and I caught the flash of his eyes in the starlight. I heard him cry out, once only—the only word, I believe, that the man uttered from first to last of the affair:

"Ah-h!"

It was like the cry of a man wounded nigh unto death, who, nevertheless, saw a chance for retaliation, who was ready to accept the battle against odds.

He swung upon his left heel, advancing his right foot sharply, lunging with a straight arm; one of the assassins stepped back upon the instant, thereby saving his life for the moment.

The whole affair has passed before us with a dreamlike illusion of unreality. Myself, I stood transfixed, aghast with the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the attack. It flashed through my mind that we had been mistaken, that those whom we had considered Von Holzborn's allies were his enemies; and they were even then proving the truth of this surmise.

It required Sevrance's word to rouse me to action.

"By Heaven!" I heard him cry. "That's murder, Traill!"

At once he sprang forward, drawing his revolver, and firing as he ran. The man nearest Von Holzborn and the woman paused in the middle of a leap, threw forward his hands, and crumpled upon the earth.

An instant later there came two shots, one sharp upon the other. The German's second assailant went down in a heap, and I saw Von Holzborn himself drop a revolver from his outstretched hand and fall back, cursing.

I had already jumped to the assistance of De Netze; Von Holzborn could go hang for all of me. I ran, I remember, awkwardly, fumbling with that infernal pistol.

The Russian was keeping the fellows at bay with a rare and admirable address, his swordpoint ringing him as with an impregnable wall of steel. They circled about like twin wolves, long knives poised in their hands, watching their opportunity to cut in under his defense.

He touched one, lightly, on the shoulder. Simultaneously I got at least the hang of my revolver and fired at the other.

My shot flew wide, doubtless, and I feared to use the weapon again; I was then close upon the fellow; he had jumped aside at the shot and stood at pause in a direct line with De Netze and Julia. The following moment brought me within jumping distance; he turned, snarling, and grappled, catching me about the waist and putting his knife through the breast of my coat; I was conscious of the kiss of the cold steel against my ribs.

Just what happened in the next three or four seconds I cannot recount very clearly. I recall only that I heard the roar of my revolver and saw the flash of it, crimson and gold fire, before my eyes. The grip of the assassin relaxed. He slumped back, flinging out his arms blindly; I saw him distinctly—he had no face.

The sight of my handiwork sickened me. Horror-stricken, I turned away, dropping the revolver.

De Netze was, at the time, finishing his antagonist. He lunged thrice, with skillful precision, fighting as imperturbably as though in a bout with buttoned foils on a gymnasium mat. At the third thrust the blade vanished—rammed to the hilt in the man's breast. In falling it was twisted out of De Netze's grasp.

TO BE CONTINUED.

WHAT HE DID WITH THEM

THE Queen of Denmark once paid a visit to the Danish colony of Iceland, where the good old bishop exerted himself to the utmost to show her everything that was worth seeing. The queen paid many compliments to her host, and, having learned that he was a family man, graciously inquired how many children he had. It happens that the Danish word for "children" is almost identical in sound with the Icelandic word for "sheep"; so the worthy bishop—whose knowledge of Danish was not so complete as it might have been—understood her majesty to ask how many sheep he owned, and promptly answered:

"Two hundred."

"Two hundred children!" cried the queen, astounded. "How can you possibly maintain such a number?"

"Easily enough, please your majesty," replied the prelate, with a cheerful smile. "In the summer I turn them out upon the hills to grass, and when winter comes I kill and eat them!"

Romances of the Race Course

By Charles Steinfort Pearson

IV.—THE CLUBHOUSE CONTINGENT

(A Complete Story)

"I'M thinkin' dis heah gray hoss of Mr. Lukens is buhnin' up de track in private, Marse Tom. If Red Eric has got ary one racer ter beat, I'm suah dat's de one, sah."

Tom Carleton, owner of a modest stable of race horses, including the four-year-old bay, Red Eric, was standing outside the stall of his favorite one evening in the late summer, going over the prospects of his horse winning the valuable Culmination Handicap, which was scheduled for a week or so later, with his colored trainer, Sam Hudson, appropriately nicknamed "Superstitious Sam."

It was just before sunset at the race course, which a few hours previous had been the scene of bustle and confusion. It was a place of restfulness and quietness now in the training headquarters, some little distance away from the immense grand stand. In the trees, a grove of which surrounded the stables where the racers had been given their final oats and were locked in for the night, the katydids were calling. From some training stable near at hand came the strumming sounds of a banjo, and a voice, evidently that of a negro *improvisatore,* was heard droning out to the instrumental accompaniment:

I'm up against it,
Up against it,
Up against it—hahd!

At the end of this came the refrain in a chorus of voices:

Babylon's fallen, ter rise no mo'!

Carleton broke the silence with a short laugh.

"Evidently those chaps didn't have a bet on Red Eric to-day, Sam," he said, finally.

"No, sah; 'deed dey didn't," was the trainer's answer. "Dat's some uv de Windom Stable boys. Lordy! it did my soul good w'en our red hoss beat deir hoss home by five lengths; it did dat. Serve 'em right fer placin' confidence in a son uv dat common Comstock sire."

Sam was as near a distinct shade of black as it is possible to get—the black which could be designated as "fast"—but his teeth were correspondingly white, and they showed themselves in a sudden gleam as he spoke. He was a powerful negro, with a face the picture of good nature. As he stood talking to Carleton he was a half head taller than the young owner. Carleton was light-haired, blue-eyed, with a face whose gravity seemed to be at variance with the mirth continually lurking in his eyes.

"I don't see why you're afraid of the Lukens horse, or any other, Sam," he declared, at last, with positiveness, "unless"—and now his face showed signs of breaking into a smile, which was striving to express itself through the eyes—"unless you've had one of your

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premonitions about the matter. Is that what makes you afraid of the gray, Sam?"

"Dat's it, Marse Tom; dat's it for a fac'," was the eager answer of the trainer. "I know yo' gwine laff at me w'en I tell yo', but yo' done hit on de trufe first crack. De las' week or so I ain' done nuffin' but dream uv a gray hoss every night, suah's yo' bawn; I doan' dream o' nuffin' else."

"Is it the same one all the time, and does it have the same points as this one of Lukens?" inquired Carleton, sarcastically.

"It look p'intedly like dat Lukens hoss, Marse Tom, an' dat's de reason I'se afeared uv him. Every night I see a big gray hoss leading his field home by six or seven lengths."

"If that's the case, I s'pose the Culmination is all in, and the best thing I can do is to withdraw Red Eric, eh, Sam?"

Apparently he was so much in earnest that the trainer took a step nearer to him, and began, pleadingly:

"Oh, Marse Tom, yo' ain' gwine do nuffin' like dat, I hopes. If I knowed yo' gwine take it so serious, I ain't say nuffin'. I guess I'm a fool. De nex' time I does any dreamin', it'll be a red hoss I see."

"No danger of my withdrawing my racer, Sam, if he's as good as he was to-day," was Carleton's reassuring reply. "Too much depends on my winning that Culmination event, you know that. It is said that dreams go by contraries, anyway, and you're the only horseman I ever knew that was afraid of a gray racer."

Sam muttered something which sounded to Carleton like:

"Well, yo' know, Mr. Lukens am a mighty shifty man, an' he's likely to tuhn a trick any time, when yo' leas' expect it."

Carleton was well aware of that. Lukens had almost a national reputation for being an owner and trainer who could win with "cast-offs," or material which did not appear to have a ghost of a chance to get first money. The fact even that he had a gray horse in his "string" would cause not a few to suspect that racer's ability. As a general rule, horsemen look with contempt at a thoroughbred of the gray shade, and say that none has ever been known to be a first-class race horse—in this country, at least.

While Carleton had the natural prejudice against a gray race horse, he knew enough to respect any racer that Lukens might enter. That owner's methods savored not infrequently of crookedness, but he had always managed to keep from being ruled off; though both in the East and West he had been called before the stewards and questioned closely in regard to the "in-and-out" running of his racers.

This particular horse, Wraith, was a Westerner, which had been campaigned by Lukens in that section, and brought East at the beginning of the racing season on the Metropolitan tracks. He was described as a three-year-old, and had been entered in two or three races, in which he had shown nothing.

The best he had done was to run third in a handicap where only second raters had contended. Carleton had wondered a little why the owner had entered him in such a rich race as the Culmination, but it had not bothered him in the slightest degree. His confidence in his own racer was supreme, particularly after the magnificent showing he had made on this particular day, when he had "spread-eagled" his field—and everyone in it was a "cracker-jack."

"Never you mind about that Lukens gray horse, or any other," remarked Carleton to the negro. "I guess what you see in your nocturnal visions is not a horse at all, but a new form of night *mare*. All you've got to do is to keep our red boy up to the mark, and the only thing we need fear is an air ship, and none has been entered in our race," he chuckled. "Just keep awake in the daytime and sleep sound at night, and we'll get to those California tracks this winter all right, Sam," he declared. "You don't want to have to spend the dark days here, do you, Sam?"

" 'Deed I doan', sah, an' dat's a fac'," laughed the trainer. "If I thought dey wouldn't 'spicion it, I'd put wheels on de hoofs uv de red hoss, and sprout wings on his shoulders, so's dey wouldn't be no danger uv his losin', 'deed I would."

"Well, you might interest yourself in getting a line on this gray horse, though I'm positive we've got nothing to fear from him. However, we know pretty well what all the others are doing, so that won't hurt."

The trainer assented, with the reservation that it was always difficult to learn anything about the workouts of the Occidental Stable.

Other stable matters were discussed outside the stall of the red horse. The racer apparently was in fine fettle, notwithstanding the tremendous exertion he had put forth in winning the big race of the day, for he whinnied once or twice, and his owner heard him give the side of the stall a resounding kick with his fleet hoof, and smiled, together with the trainer, as he heard.

"He'll be mighty hard to beat, Sam," he said, confidently, and his companion nodded.

By this time it was dark, the stars were peeping through the trees, the big infield was a black expanse, a light or two glimmered in the windows of training quarters, and an owl was mumbling disconsolately in one of the trees back of the grand stand.

It was not only lonely but chilly, and Carleton shivered slightly as he left the trainer with the parting injunction:

"Give the bay more than the usual amount of oats to-morrow, Sam, and let him down easy for a day or so."

As he walked briskly down the path by the outside rail of the home stretch, he had forgotten all about Sam's forebodings, and the gray Lukens horse. From drawing a comparison between his surroundings at the present and what they had been in the afternoon—for there can be no greater contrast than that of a busy race course in the daytime and at night—his thoughts suddenly jumped to the other side of the ocean.

The one of whom he was thinking was Edith Varick. It was not true that she was his sweetheart—now. Perhaps she had been, in times past. That was before Tom's father had died so suddenly, before the host of unsuspected creditors had swooped down. When they had been satisfied, only two or three of the horses which his father had raced for pastime were left for the son to race as a means of livelihood. Red Eric was his own horse. Tom did know horses, if he knew nothing else. It was his intention to campaign the racers he owned, and if luck favored him, perhaps he might go to higher things.

All this had happened in three years, he reflected. His father's death had occurred just after Miss Varick had gone abroad with the family for a long stay.

Of course, she was out of the question now. No matter what they had been to one another before the smash, it was all different at this time. She was being courted by all the best of the foreigners, a dazzling beauty, an heiress to many millions. She and hers made up the "clubhouse contingent," while he was only one of the small army of men who raced horses for profit. It was all well enough for a rich man to own his stable and see his horses run for sport. With him it was different.

All this passed through his mind as he walked briskly to the entrance. Only once had he heard from Edith, and that was when he had received a tenderly sympathetic note from her, written in London, condoling with him on the loss of his father. Of course, she did not know how his circumstances had changed. Where she was he did not know, though semi-occasionally he had seen bits about her in society journals, the guest of this and that titled personage, the recipient of marked attentions from Count this or Baron that—no more.

It was hard, but Tom was glad that he had not asked her to become his wife before the worst had come. That would have made it still harder. He

had cast his lot with the horses, and, as he did everything, he was going in for all it was worth. There was only himself to look after.

How fond Edith had been of the horses, and what an eye she had for their "points"! As for winners—well, she was a wonder!

Her people were not particularly interested in the racing game, though her brother, Eugene Varick, was something of an enthusiast, despite the fact that he claimed no thoroughbreds of his own. Miss Edith, however, was "horse crazy"—at least so the others of the family laughingly asserted. She and Carleton had been sweethearts when he was in knickerbockers, she in a pinafore. The elder Carleton, supposedly wealthy, always had maintained a racing establishment, in which Tom took keen delight. Edith had shared in this delight with him, and when they were older she had accompanied Tom to the races often, and had helped him pet the thoroughbreds in their training quarters.

It was really remarkable how she could distinguish one horse from another, even at a distance, when Tom himself had failed to recognize their distinctive markings. Such a thing is a gift, as everyone knows, and, in consequence, Miss Edith was idolized by the people connected with the Carleton establishment.

It was regarded by both families as an assured thing that the two would marry. Strange to say, the nearer they approached to the time that the engagement should be an assured thing, the more of an air of constraint appeared to hover about them both. And yet there was no known reason for it. Tom had allowed the girl to go abroad for an indefinite period without having a distinct understanding, and had sworn at himself afterward—until his father had died and he learned the state of his finances. It seemed to him providential, looked at from his own chivalric, unselfish standpoint.

In spite of himself, on his way home from the training quarters, Tom felt gloomy, a spirit of depression sat upon him. From feeling every confidence that his horse would win, Sam's direful foreboding concerning the gray racer had shaken that confidence and made him wonder if the trainer really knew more about Lukens' horse than he cared to admit.

"Confound that darky!" he told himself. "I wish he'd keep all his dreams to himself. Pshaw! I'm as big a fool as he is, to be affected by what he says."

At the same time he knew that Sam was no fool, and in the way of "doping out" winners was more than wise. Carleton often had laughed secretly at the manner in which the trainer doled out bits of information—"tips"—regarding the prospects of horses connected with other stables than his own to stable boys and superstitious race track followers, for good, hard cash.

Sam's claim for himself was that, as he was a New Orleans negro, he came of old "voodoo" stock, and, being "the seventh son of a seventh son," in addition, could foretell events from dreams. Of course any "foretelling" was done by the trainer's natural shrewdness, coupled with the inside information he was able to gather regarding the horses. It was the first time Sam had ever attempted to parade his second sight business to his employer. Tom did not like it, for he was practical enough to believe that something was back of it all.

Carleton was bent on winning the Culmination with Red Eric, for the purse itself, something more than twenty thousand dollars to the winner, with a big bet on the side, would put him on Sunny Street and pay for transporting the horses he had, as well as defray the feed bills for a long time in California. Then Tom had his eye on a couple of two-year-olds which he might purchase and develop in the West. If Red Eric should lose, he really did not see how the trip could be made. Once out there with his horses, purses could be picked up easily, he imagined.

Tom was at the training quarters the next morning as usual, to inspect his horses. Sam said nothing about any

"dream" which he might have had the night before, though he did not look happy, Tom noticed, when he gave him a furtive look. The trainer did not again mention the gray horse.

What both owner and trainer were interested in particularly at this time was the matter of getting their equine star accustomed to running the "reverse" way of the track. In the United States it is the rule for horses to run from left to right, the same way that a man reads. In Europe races are run in just the opposite manner—from right to left. The opening of a new race course, the first day's meeting of which was to be marked by the Culmination Handicap, was to introduce the startling innovation of racing from right to left.

This change in the order of things was expected to cause many reversals of form. When a horse is trained on the regulation tracks, the tendency always is to induce him to "bear in" as near the inner rail as possible, for naturally the shortest way around on a circular track is the inside. When a horse has been accustomed to bearing to the left, in running from left to right, and the reverse way is ordered, the animal still will incline to the left, thus making him cover more ground than he should otherwise.

Carleton and the trainer had discussed this phase of the running of the race, and had reached one conclusion. Red Eric was notably a free running horse, with a hard mouth, which made him hard to handle. It was known that he had not taken as kindly to running the reverse way as some of the other horses training for the Culmination. One jockey was regarded as the best to ride Red Eric to advantage. Patsy Flynn was the one in question, possessing as he did prodigious strength for so small a frame, with alertness and ability to grasp a situation at a glance.

Tom regarded himself as particularly fortunate in being able to secure Flynn's services for this race. Patsy's employers, who, of course, had first call on his services, had entered a horse for the Culmination, but it had "gone wrong," and the jockey, therefore, was at liberty. Carleton made him an offer —one hundred dollars to take the mount, five hundred dollars more in the event of his winning—and Patsy appeared highly enthusiastic over the prospect.

"Sure Reddy is the best wan of the bunch, an' I've got the five hundred tucked in me vest pocket, while I light a seegar wid the wan hundred," said Patsy to Carleton, confidentially.

That was three days before the race was to be run. Patsy was not lacking in confidence in himself or the racer, apparently. The speech was made at the stall where the racer was confined. The trainer was there, too.

"Well, I don't know as annybody could keep him straight anny better than meself," declared Patsy, somewhat arrogantly, as he lifted his spick and span new tile from his head in a majestic manner, pulled out his pocket handkerchief and flicked some imaginary dust from his shiny patent leather shoes. It was at the Carleton stable in the morning before the races at the old track. Little Flynn was always fond of getting "inthroduced," as he expressed it, to the horse he expected to ride in a big race. The regular stable jockey, Lusk, always had ridden Red Eric before, but he was not so strong as Patsy, so he had been shelved for the time being.

"There ain't no hoss in that race is goin' ter git close enough ter you to catch the dust from yer hoofs that day, Reddy," said Flynn, with a parting slap on the horse's neck, as he turned to go.

"Sam thinks Red Eric is destined to be beaten by Lukens' gray horse, Patsy," said Carleton, with a glance of amusement at the trainer. Sam looked up with a start—and a guilty expression. Flynn regarded him contemptuously.

"Humph! more like a green wan than anny gray wan, Tom," he said, sententiously. "As for you," he added, to Sam, "you're a natural-born hoodoo. It's a wonder ter me yer ain't cross-eyed."

Then he strode away, as if disgusted completely.

"What do you think about the Lukens horse now, Sam?" asked Carleton, with an air of triumph, after Flynn had departed.

Sam was silent for a moment or two before replying, then he said, earnestly:

"Marse Tom, I'se afeared uv dat hoss. I don't like ter tell yo' how much afeared uv him I really is, sah. I still believes dat he's de mos' dangerous 'ponent dat our hoss has."

"What's the matter, Sam — been dreamin' of more gray horses?" inquired Carleton, with a smile.

The trainer did not reply immediately. When he glanced up he looked his employer straight in the eye, and replied, slowly:

"It ain't a gray hoss dis time, Marse Tom. It's suthin' wuss dan dat. It's a big gray cat. I've sen it fer three nights runnin', an' yo' know a cat's a mighty unlucky thing to dream erbout. Dat's a fac'."

"Oh, bosh, Sam!—don't you try to work any of your seventh son business on me, for I won't stand for it," declared Carleton, with a show of anger. "All I ask of you is that you have the horse good and fit the day of the race. I say, hang your dreams!"

"And all I begs of yo', Marse Tom, is dat yo' doan' have too big a bet on de hoss in de Culmination, sah, dat's all," Sam declared, in a tone of entreaty as he moved away.

It was strange that the augury of bad luck should prove a true one, but it did.

In the races of the afternoon, Carleton had a two-year-old which was a notoriously bad actor at the post. The colt had started two or three times, but on account of its nervousness and irritability, generally refusing to break with the others, had never been "in the money." Both the trainer and Carleton were confident that Viking possessed speed enough to win if he got off well. Consequently they spared no pains to have him "schooled to the barrier," as it is called.

Special hours are set, at which times an assistant starter takes the young horses in hand, and with exercise lads or jockeys up, they are trained to watch for the springing of the barrier, and to get in their stride immediately. It is remarkable how quickly a sensible thoroughbred will grasp what is expected of it.

Interest to see how the effect of Viking's special schooling would improve him in a real race attracted both Sam and Carleton to watch the start of the third race, the one for two-year-olds in which Viking was entered. The barrier was some distance from the grand stand, in front of which, of course, the finish would take place.

Fourteen youngsters were started, and, as it happened, Patsy Flynn was astride of a big chestnut colt, the heavy favorite for the race, which was expected to win. Evidently Flynn had been given orders to be sure and get off well, for as Carleton and Sam stood near the starter's stand, they saw that the jockey was much in earnest about getting off in the lead. Two or three times, when the steely-blue eyes of the rider caught a movement of the starter that he thought betokened the pressing of the electric button which would release the barrier, Flynn urged his willing mount to the front. Each time he received an admonition and warning from the starter.

"If you try that again, Flynn, I'll set you down for a week," shouted the exasperated official.

The very next instant Flynn had tried the same trick.

"You are suspended for a period of six days after this race, Flynn," roared the starter, and Carleton with surprise and chagrin watched the starter's clerk record the penalty.

It was such a heavy blow to Carleton that he could only gaze at the colts as they dashed away in perfect alignment immediately afterward. What the loss of Patsy meant to him in that race only Carleton and the trainer could realize. It was a sudden dashing of his hopes to the ground, for, with Flynn's services lost, Red Eric's chances of win-

ning were greatly lessened. Although he was not addicted to profanity, some words which would not appear well in print escaped him. He looked hard at Sam, who quailed under his gaze.

"Confound you and your hoodoos!" he yelled. "If you dare to say to me, 'I told you so,' I'll discharge you on the spot. What with your spook horses and cats you've got me going, I can tell you. You're the limit. You—you——" he sputtered, so furious he could not finish the sentence.

Poor Sam could only bow his head under the storm. He made no attempt to defend himself, but merely shook his head dolefully, and hurried away in the direction of the paddock, where Tom followed more slowly, learning with slight interest, in view of what had occurred, that Viking had been beaten but a nose by Flynn's mount, and that the race was run in record time.

Carleton was strong-hearted and not to be daunted by an unforeseen occurrence, so he put the best face he could on the matter, and went ahead as if the question of Red Eric winning the Culmination was only one of time. The horse never had been better, Tom knew, and he did not believe that any horse in the race could show him his heels. Then, too, he appeared to have become accustomed to the reverse way of running, and Tom felt that, after all, perhaps Lusk could ride him as well as Flynn, if he kept his head and followed instructions fully. No more could be done, and Carleton waited for the day of the race.

It was the evening before the big day, and the owner was about to leave the stable for home, when he heard a step behind him, and looked up to see —Lukens. He was the one man above all others whom Tom did not fancy, for he had an innate feeling that the owner employed underhand methods.

Lukens was a big fellow, with round, red face, a husky voice, and a constant smile, more crafty than friendly.

"How's the red horse, Tom?" began Lukens, with an easy air of familiarity. "Pretty good, I hear," he continued, without giving Carleton time to reply. "Going to win with him to-morrow, are you?" he inquired, with a chuckle.

"That's what he's in the race for—to win, if he can, Mr. Lukens," said Carleton, nonchalantly. "I believe he stands a pretty good show of winning."

Lukens fidgeted about a while, making casual remarks on other subjects than racing, and appeared somewhat ill at ease, Tom thought. When he started to walk away Lukens followed him, chewing tobacco vigorously. After a premonitory cough, the visiting owner stopped short and put a detaining hand on Carleton's shoulder.

"Stop a minute, Tom," he said. "I want to speak to you about a—a—little matter—well, it's about the race to-morrow."

"You are at liberty to go ahead, Mr. Lukens."

"Now, look here, Tom Carleton," blurted out the owner, "you're a young man, an' a mighty bright one, an'—an' I've always had a liking for you. I know you haven't got too much ready cash, an' I want to help you. I like to see a young man like you get ahead. I'm going to help you, but I don't want this talk to go any further—understand?"

Tom hesitated a little.

"You can say anything you want to me without fear of its being repeated, Lukens," he declared.

"Well, it's this, Tom—in that race to-morrow there are just two horses that are going to be anywhere near together at the finish, and they will be your red horse an' my gray. That gray horse has been working better than any other beside yours, an' I figure, at the weights, that he'll mebbe be a little better than yours. He's been eatin' up the track. I figure that it's going to be a mighty close fit between your horse an' mine. That being the case——"

"Well?" inquired Carleton, curtly.

"Why can't you an' I frame it up so that the gray can win, sure?" he began, eagerly. "I'll give you half the purse and half the winnings. Why, my horse will be as good as twenty-five to one. I'll put up the amount of bets, an' the

trick can't fail to go through. Your horse will be at a short price, so you'll be ahead more than if your horse did win."

Lukens could not see Carleton's face in the darkness, and mistook his silence for consent.

"You're a good enough man of business to appreciate what the thing will mean for us both," Lukens continued. "Racing's a crooked game at best, an'——"

"You're right, Lukens, it is a crooked game when such scoundrels as you are allowed to take part in it," Tom snapped out so sharply that the other recoiled a pace. "You're the sort that ruins any sport, you infernal rascal," he added, with growing anger. "The trouble is that one crooked owner like you is regarded as the representative of the whole. Did you think you could bribe me with your dirty proposition, you hound?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Why, it's simply a business proposition, Tom," began the surprised Lukens. "I thought——"

"I don't care a rap what you thought," broke out Carleton, passionately. "Whatever it was, it was something crooked. Let me tell you, I'm a gentleman and a sportsman," he declared. "My horse is in that race tomorrow to win or lose on his merits. You've made a mistake in me. I don't want you ever to open your mouth to me again, Lukens, on any subject," he said, savagely. "My opinion of you is that a man loses caste simply by being seen speaking to you—understand?"

"There's nothing to fly into such a temper about, Tom," murmured Lukens, soothingly. "Remember, I've got your promise that this thing don't go any further than between you and me."

"If you don't want me to break that promise, Lukens, then the best thing for you to do is to get away from me as soon as possible, that's all."

For fear the owner might not take him at his word, he put distance between him and the other as rapidly as possible. It was some time before Tom cooled down. Of course, what Lukens had wanted him to do was to have his horse pulled, so that the gray could win. It made him rage inwardly each time he thought of it.

Preceding the Culmination race, the big one of the day, and consequently the fourth on the card, Carleton did not visit the grand stand or paddock, but busied himself about the stable and accompanied Red Eric to the paddock just before the handicap was to take place. The paddock adjoined the clubhouse, which was filled with a gay throng of racegoers representing the society element.

Beautifully gowned women were passing and repassing the clubhouse gate, and Carleton was watching them idly, thinking how only a short time before he had been one of the clubhouse *habitués,* dancing attendance on at least one fair creature.

It was different now, but he did not care so much, except for one thing. Suddenly he stood up straight, his breath came quickly, he stared and stared in amazement, scarcely able to believe his eyesight. For from among the gay throng he saw a beautiful girl coming toward him with eager, smiling face, an outstretched hand, and the warm words of welcome:

"Why, Tom Carleton! How are you? I've been watching for you. I've looked everywhere in the clubhouse for you, but not a sign of your dear old face could I see. Didn't you know I'd be here to see you, Tom?" she whispered.

"Why, I didn't even know you were on this side of the water, Edith," he exclaimed, eagerly.

"We've been back a whole week, and not a word of greeting have I had," she declared.

"I had no more idea that you had returned than the man in the moon, Edith," he hastened to reassure her.

How charming she looked, how self-possessed, how far above him now, he pondered.

"Besides, things have changed since we were together last, Edith," he said, sadly. "I suppose you heard of father's death and what followed."

She looked at him keenly.

"Only rumors that—that he was not as wealthy as supposed, and that you had but little left, Tom," was her answer. "You knew me well enough to know that such a thing, or anything else, could not have the slightest effect on our friendship, Tom."

"Would you like to see Red Eric, Edith?" he asked her presently. "You remember him as a promising yearling, doubtless."

"Quite well, Tom. I understand that he will be the winner to-day, and I came down to see him—and you, of course," she added, naïvely.

The same frank, unaffected, delightful companion of old Carleton found her. As they looked over his red horse she told him how she had often visited the race tracks abroad, particularly those in France — Longchamps, St. Cloud and the rest—and had taken an interest in their racing establishments on his account particularly.

"You know that you instilled in me the love of racing, Tom," she said.

"Yonder is the horse said to have the best chance of beating Eric," he told her, with some bitterness, and together they walked over to inspect the big gray. Lukens was not visible.

Wraith, the Lukens representative, besides being gray, was a remarkable looking animal. Compared with the rest of his body, the head was unusually small and bony, and down the center of the forehead ran a coffin-shaped band of white. In addition, the horse had four white "stockings" on his legs.

Edith gazed at the horse with a puzzled expression, and Tom smiled at her.

"You always had a great eye for a thoroughbred's points, didn't you, Edith?" he laughed. "That's an extraordinary looking animal, by the way. Never saw one like him before, I'll be bound."

Still the girl gazed at the gray as if fascinated.

"Why, that's surely——" she said. And then, checking herself, asked eagerly:

"Who is his owner, Tom? Has he a good reputation, or otherwise? Tell me quick, please, as I'm interested for a certain reason. I wonder where I can find Mr. Grantham."

"I'm afraid Lukens, the owner, is not regarded as being straight as the proverbial string, Edith," he told her.

Just then the saddling bell sounded, and Carleton excused himself, saying that he must attend to his horse, and would see her after the race.

He wondered vaguely, as they separated, what she had meant by saying that she must see Mr. Grantham. Grantham was one of the racing stewards. However, Tom forgot all about it in the excitement of watching the final preparations for the race, and giving final instructions to Jockey Lusk to keep his mount from "running out" at the last turn.

He breathed a sigh of thankfulness as the horses paraded out on the track, hurried to the betting ring, and put a couple of thousand on his horse at four to one. The horse had opened at threes, and the last odds were a point higher. Wraith had opened at thirty and closed at ten—some one had backed the long shot heavily.

Standing on the packed lawn, Carleton heard the shout, and felt the resultant electric thrill which told the race was begun. Coincident with the cloud of dust up the chute, which told they were "off," he saw the long body of a gray racer shoot to the fore. He knew that Wraith, the horse of Lukens, the turfite "crook," was in the lead.

Hurriedly his eyes sought for the famous "bumble-bee" colors, which had been his father's and were now his own. The black and yellow he saw in fourth position, and as the horses thundered down the chute where the start began, past the grand stand to the accompanying roar of the thousands, Red Eric still held the same position. That did not worry him, for the red horse was a slow beginner always, seeming to go faster the further he went, running the final furlong often, strange to say, faster than the previous.

What did worry Carleton, however, as he stood tense and silent, with the murmuring multitude around him, was

that the big gray seemed to be a wild horse in the way of running. As he went out around the first turn, Tom saw that the gray was widening the distance between himself and his pursuers. Moreover, he had the rail, and was hugging it closely, as if the reverse way of running was the kind to which he always had been accustomed. His jockey, Verner, especially engaged for this race, was a "crack," second only to Flynn, in Carleton's estimation, and lacking only Patsy's muscle.

Wraith still led down the back stretch As he watched, Carleton realized that the only thing that now would make it possible for his own horse to win was that the other could not maintain the great speed which he was showing.

Halfway down the back stretch Lusk did make a move, as if in response to Carleton's suggestion. His speed increasing at every stride, the black and yellow drew up, up past the pink and blue jacket, the cerise and gold dots, and now was at the gray horse's haunches, to the exultation of the thousands of spectators who had bet on the Carleton horse, the popular favorite.

At Wraith's haunches the head of Red Eric reached and got no further. Down to the last turn for home they raced in that position, the gray horse a full length in the lead, the red horse measuring stride for stride.

Carleton saw Lusk draw his whip, and bent forward eagerly.

"Not there, don't do it there, you fool!" he yelled. "Wait until you reach the straight. Pull on the right rein to make him hug the corner!"

But, of course, the admonition was wasted. Rising in his stirrups, the frantic jockey struck the red horse two or three swift blows.

In response Red Eric drew closer up, until he was but a half length behind the gray streak in front. A second later Carleton gave a groan. The expected had happened. Red Eric swung wide, far away from the inner rail, and had reached the center of the course, losing two good lengths before his rider had him straightened out. It was too late.

Dismayed but not disheartened, Lusk set sail for the flying Wraith, whip flashing downward with each stride, heels working the steel in the side of his mount.

It was a magnificent struggle. No racegoer present had ever witnessed a finer. Wraith was leg weary, but still game as the other horse which was striving, with all the speed and stamina for which he was noted, to overtake his rival in the final furlong.

It was doubtful, too, whether the red horse would not still prove the winner. All the cries of the huge crowd were for Red Eric. The gray was forsaken.

If the distance had been a hundred feet further Red Eric would have won by a big margin. They passed the finish post with the gray a head in front. Fifty feet beyond the red horse was ahead.

Carleton had partly forgotten his disappointment in the excitement of the struggle. Some one came up to him and was saying huskily, between sobs:

"I wuz afeared uv dat gray, Mr. Tom, I wuz suah afeared uv him. I knowed how good he wuz, I didn't want to 'scourage yo', sah, dat's de reason I lied erbout dreamin' all de time. I didn't want yo' ter lose any bets on Eric."

"It wouldn't have made any difference, Sam," declared Carleton. "I'd have bet anyway. It's all over now."

"Something's keeping the judges from verifying the race, Carleton," said a horseman acquaintance. "It looks like you've still got a chance. The stewards and the judges are having a mighty confab up in the judges' stand."

Tom had been too busy to notice it.

"I didn't see any foul committed," he said, somewhat puzzled. "I can't imagine what the trouble is."

The red board did not go up on the number board then, or later. It was noised about that the gray horse was a "ringer." The bookmakers held all bets until the question of "ringing" was decided one way or the other. A general air of consternation was visible on the faces of the spectators.

"Mr. Grantham wishes to see you.

Mr. Carleton," Tom was told by a clubhouse messenger, after he had returned to the paddock.

"Is he in the judges' stand?" asked Carleton, still wearing the old look of surprise.

"No, sir, he's in the clubhouse. I'll take you to him."

Carleton followed, more mystified than ever, and was soon in the presence of Grantham in an upstairs room of the clubhouse. Grantham was not alone, Tom found. The two other stewards were there, closeted with him, and a lady. She was Edith Varick.

The stewards' faces were very grave. Carleton looked with astonishment from one to another. Miss Varick, apparently, was the least disturbed of the trio. She was perfectly self-possessed, and smiled faintly as her eyes met those of the young owner.

Grantham cleared his throat.

"We have reason to believe that the Lukens horse is a 'ringer,' Mr. Carleton," he began. "We have been a trifle suspicious that this was the case, all along, though superficial evidence that the animal is the gray racer, Wraith, which was seen on the Western tracks last season, was not altogether lacking."

"What has the owner to say?"

"Not a word," was the sarcastic reply, "since he has disappeared completely. This seems to strengthen the case against him. We are holding the horse for complete identification. We called you to inform you, however, that it is more than probable that the race will go to you eventually."

Carleton murmured some words of pleasure that such should be the case.

"You have Miss Varick here to thank more than anyone else, Mr. Carleton," was Grantham's smiling declaration. "She has positively identified Wraith as a thoroughbred she saw at the St. Cloud race course, in France, last season. She declares she inspected him there, and recognizes him without a shadow of possibility of mistake. We have sufficient confidence in her ability to discern the distinctive marks of a thoroughbred to reserve our decision until we hear from the French Jockey Club," he said, bowing in Miss Varick's direction. "That is all, I believe, Mr. Carleton."

He and Edith left the room together. At the head of the big stairway he halted, and looked at the girl. Her eyes dropped. They were alone. He was thinking what to say.

"I suppose you will go to California now, Tom, as the race certainly will be awarded to you?" she said, shyly.

"Not unless you will accompany me as my wife, dearest," he declared, putting an arm around her slim waist, and drawing her to him.

"Oh, Tom, please don't," she begged, striving to free herself. "Oh! somebody will see us."

"I will not release you until you say 'yes,' sweetheart," he answered, still holding her tightly.

"Well, then, it is 'yes,' dear," she said, softly, adding, as she lifted a blushing face to his: "It would be 'yes' now and all the time, Tom; you should know that."

It was to be expected that the papers would spread themselves on the facts of the winner of the big race being a "ringer" and being disqualified in consequence. It was stated that the gray horse, a high-class racer in France, where grays are not infrequently "cracks," had been recognized by one of the "clubhouse contingent," who had seen the animal in his own country. The little love story was not learned.

In reality, Wraith was Le Soleil, a racer which had become crippled temporarily, had been sold to Lukens, shipped to the United States as a circus animal, and completely cured by the rascally owner to make a "killing" in the East. The real gray horse, Wraith, which was not unlike Le Soleil in general characteristics, was found drawing a cab in a Western city. The horse had been sold, as no earthly good for anything else, by Lukens. His own brain had evolved the "ringing" scheme from first to last.

Thanks to the "clubhouse contingent," it had failed.

THE APE AND THE DIAMOND

By Richard Marsh

Author of "The Whistle of Fate," "The House of Mystery," Etc.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO VISITORS FROM—WHERE?

TO and fro he paced, up and down, and round and round, trying to find the solution to the problem.

As he persisted in his "sentry go" — for that problem was hard to solve—he was conscious of something; what it was he himself could not quite make out. It seemed—it was only seeming, for he looked about him and saw that it was so—that there was some one with him in the room. It was not an altogether pleasant sensation, and it was a ridiculous one, to boot.

But as he turned the problem over and over in his mind, he thought that he heard once, and then again, rather a curious sound, like the sound of a chuckle.

He thought at first it was the diamond.

He paused in his perambulations and glared at it. It had shown itself capable of so many pleasing little eccentricities—he could have sworn that it had already laughed at him once—that nothing would have surprised him which came from that direction. But it seemed to him that the sound of that chuckle did not come from the neighborhood of the stone.

He had heard it first when he had been coming from the mantelpiece toward the door. He was passing the table on his left, and the diamond was on the table just in front of him.

The chuckle—if it was a chuckle, it was very faint, so that it was hard to make quite sure—came from behind. It was so unexpected that he wheeled right round to see if anyone else had made a sudden appearance in the room; but there was no one there.

Then he glared at the diamond; it looked innocent enough, as it lay in its tranquil beauty on the table.

He told himself he was mistaken. His brain was in a highly sensitized condition. He fancied things, as who would not who had gone through his experiences of the last few hours? He continued his prowlings to and fro.

The sound again. It was odd, very odd, indeed. This time it was more distinct than before, resembling the chuckle which might be supposed to issue from a feeble pair of lungs.

This time Mr. Hookham was advancing toward the mantelpiece, and it came from in front, not from behind. He started. He looked up. There was no one there. He glanced at the diamond. It seemed still; besides, the sound did not come from its neighborhood at all.

Could there be anyone in the room beyond? He caught up the candle from the table and advanced to see. Opening the door of his bedroom, he passed in. There was no one there. What could it be?

As he moved to replace the candle on the table, he was aware of quite a strange sensation—as though he had passed a living thing. He had felt nothing—nothing tangible, that is—and yet, if you pass close to a person in the dark, though you neither touch nor see nor hear him, you are quite capable of being

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This serial began in the May number. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

made conscious that there is something there. In the same way, Mr. Hookham was conscious that there was something there just then.

But of course it was hallucination. In this case it was not dark, but light—light enough, at any rate, to see. And Mr. Hookham saw—he *saw* that there was nothing there. That should have been sufficient to content him. Possibly it was.

"If I don't take care I shall be ill. If I die the diamond will be credited with the honor of having been the death of me. I had better go to bed."

But he did not go to bed. He continued pacing to and fro. But he could not fix his mind upon the problem; not at all. It annoyed him, and not wholly without cause. There are few things so irritating as not being able to concentrate one's thoughts at will.

He was conscious, too, of an odd reluctance to advance too near to that end of the room which contained the mantelpiece. As he approached slowly, step by step, he found himself raising his head and glancing eagerly in front of him with, so to speak, all his eyes. There was nothing to glance at, nothing but vacancy, and the objects which he had beheld day after day, year after year.

At a certain point he stood quite still, he hardly knew why, but he did. His form was slightly bent, his head was thrown forward, and he stared, as though he would resolve something out of nothing.

And as he stared the sound came again—the sound of the chuckle. It came from just in front of him. One might have said that he could have put out his hand and touched the chuckler, only there was no chuckler to be seen.

And almost in the same instant the diamond laughed—there was no mistake about it—the two sounds were quite distinct. The chuckle was a trifle wheezy, the laugh was the most musical of sounds.

Mr. Hookham whirled round like a teetotum set spinning. He glowered at the diamond. There lay the stone, on the old oak table, serenely still.

It was most absurd. Was he again going to be victimized by its elfish pranks and capers? Could he not have one night in peace? He moved toward the table, intending to take the diamond and replace it in the safe. The instant he moved the chuckle came again. As if involuntarily, he caught hold of the edge of the table and stood quite still.

What made his heart suddenly cease, or seem to cease, its action? After what he had gone through there was nothing which could be called surprising, even in the chuckle of an unseen chuckler. Yet he seemed more terrified than he had been at the Sphinx's Cave, and with a different kind of fear.

As he clung to the table's edge, he trembled, as with palsy. It was more than a minute before the fit passed away. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from off his brow.

"I—I could have sworn I'd heard that voice before." He turned to the diamond with sudden rage. "What trick are you going to play me now?"

As he stood glaring at the crystal with what was apparently unreasonable rage, the sound came again—the sound of the chuckle. And now it was not one chuckle, but several—a sort of continuous cachinnation, more a cackling than a chuckling.

Mr. Hookham turned an ashen face in the direction of the unseasonable mirth, and the look returned to it which had been so noticeable at the Sphinx's Cave—the look of extreme old age. "It's his voice," he gasped.

The sound ceased. All was still. But he had localized the spot from whence it seemed to issue—the old armchair. His own armchair, the only one the room contained. And a fine mockery of an armchair it was.

As if fascinated, Mr. Hookham continued to gaze at it. He might never have seen it in his life before. It might have been the most marvelous object which ever ravished the eyes of a lover of bric-à-brac. By degrees he regained his calmness—he had been trembling like a leaf—and something of the appearance of extreme senility passed from him, but only for a moment.

For while he continued to look something happened which—if it were not an optical delusion, and even if it were an optical delusion—was calculated to shake the nerves of the strongest man.

The chair was empty. That was plain enough at first. But as he still stood staring, something—a shadowy outline—began to appear about the neighborhood of the seat.

Mr. Hookham's hair came as near to standing up on end as ever a man's came yet. He told himself that it was a delusion; still his flesh began to creep, for the worst of it was that it was a delusion from which it was impossible to take his eyes away.

The outline deepened. He saw outlined the figure of a man who seemed to be squatting on the seat. The outline gradually filled in. Mr. Hookham's sensations, as he beheld that outline slowly taking the form, shape and substance of a man, are not to be described in words.

It seemed to him that the process of materialization lasted hours; but then it is proverbial how slowly the time does crawl when we are not enjoying ourselves to any great extent, and no man ever enjoyed himself to a less extent than did Mr. Hookham then; but when it was finished, there, in the armchair, was seated what seemed to be a man.

An old man, a little old man, clad in a suit of rusty black. He made a bad fit for the chair—there was room in it for at least two of him—though it must be allowed that Mr. Hookham found there was quite enough with one. He was sitting forward in the chair, by no means in an upright position—as though his back were weak—and his elbows rested on the arms of the chair.

He had a long, narrow, clean-shaven face, which was very white and drawn—it looked a very cruel one, and it was by no means the face of a man whom one would take for a friend. His hair, of which there was a great deal, was long and snowy white. It was drawn back from his mean, receding forehead—which style of wearing it by no means added to the generally pleasant appearance of his countenance.

And he was grinning—it would be a libel on laughter to call the mirthless grin which convulsed his face a smile—and as he grinned, he chuckled; it was the sound which had first startled Mr. Hookham's ears.

When the process of materialization, if we may write it so, was finished, Mr. Hookham turned, and clutched at the edge of the table, and sank on his knees, and hid his face on the board.

"Matthew!" he gasped, and then was still.

The figure on the chair continued chuckling. It seemed almost mechanical, as though it were a trick he had. He kept his keen, cruel eyes, which were as bright as a lad's at twenty, bright with an almost unnatural brightness, fixed on the old man cowering by the table.

"Sammy," he said.

He spoke in a harsh, grating voice, which harmonized with his general appearance—it was curious what a strong resemblance it had to Mr. Hookham's. When Mr. Hookham heard it he gave a groan and seemed to cling closer to the table. The figure in the chair continued:

"I told you I would come and see the fun."

And he chuckled as a hen cackles—as though he never could leave off.

There was silence, a silence which lasted some three or four minutes. During the whole of it Mr. Hookham trembled with a trembling which was quite perceptible, and that in spite of the support afforded by the table. The sight of his distress seemed to afford the figure in the chair the keenest satisfaction. He never ceased his chuckling, though the sound of his mirth would have conveyed anything but a mirthful feeling to sensitive nerves. He repeated his words again:

"I told you I would come and see the fun—he, he, he, he, he, he, he, he!"

His "he, he, he's!" bade fair to stretch out and bridge eternity. But the sight of Mr. Hookham's abject misery seemed to pall upon him after a time.

"Get up!" His voice had rather the sound of a snarl, but he continued

chuckling all the time. "Let me see your face, my Sammy!"

After a further momentary interval of silence, which the chuckler did not seem to take altogether pleasantly, Mr. Hookham did get up, and as he regained his feet he turned his face toward the figure on the chair.

He looked at him steadily. As he looked his calmness gradually returned. The look of dreadful fear passed from him, and instead there came a look which was not love.

"So it's you!"

As he uttered the three little words his voice reminded one of the grating of a saw.

"Yes; it's me."

The figure on the chair had evidently no regard for the niceties of grammar. They looked at each other long and steadily, the two old men. And as he looked, on Mr. Hookham's face there began gradually to appear such a look of hatred that one almost wondered that the other could bear to face it.

"I thought it was you when I heard you first."

"Good brother, to remember his brother's voice for more than sixteen years."

"I was not likely to forget it, if it had been sixty."

Mr. Hookham turned, and began slowly to pace toward the opposite end of the room.

The old man watched him as he went.

"You look old and worn and thin." The criticism was uttered with a sort of indescribable glee. Mr. Hookham sneered; but he said nothing. "You're not talkative, Sammy. One would think that brothers would have a good deal to say to each other, re-meeting, for the first time, after an absence of more than sixteen years."

Mr. Hookham turned. He advanced close to the figure on the chair. Then, pausing, he stood quite still, regarding the person seated there with such a look of resolute hatred that the old man seemed to have doubts as to his intentions. He rose from the chair with a scream.

"Don't touch me, or I will strike you dead!"

Mr. Hookham never quailed, although the other's passion was diabolical.

"I am not afraid of death. Nor am I, now, afraid of you."

"Are you sure?"

The newcomer thrust out his hand and placed it on the other's shoulder. As he felt the touch, Mr. Hookham shuddered quite perceptibly.

"Ah, Sammy, don't you be too sure!"

But Mr. Hookham's tranquillity almost immediately returned. The look of hatred had never left him.

"I am sure. I never feared you living."

"But you fear me dead!"

"Nor do I fear you dead."

The two men stood face to face. You could see then what a curious likeness there was between them. It extended not only to the voice, but to the form and features—only Samuel was on a somewhat larger scale than Matthew. He was a little taller, a little stouter, a little broader across the chest. He looked a little younger, too; his hair was iron-gray, and he wore it on his forehead, while Matthew pushed his off his brow, and its hue was snowy white. But the likeness unmistakably was there. There was no mistaking them for anything but brothers.

They stood regarding each other for some moments silently. Then Matthew thrust his brother from him with such force that he sent him reeling half across the room.

"You devil!"

"Nay, it is you who are the devil, Matt, not I."

"Yes!" cried Matthew, with a chuckle which was very like a scream, "I am the devil's own!"

"That is so. You are the devil's own—living or dead."

They stood again contemplating each other silently; then Samuel turned and began pacing to and fro, up and down the room. Matthew watched him from his perpendicular position for a time. Then, reseating himself, he continued to watch him from his position on the chair.

"I told you I would come and see the fun." Samuel sneered, but he vouchsafed no other answer. "It's the diamond has brought me." Samuel sneered again.

"What do you think of the diamond, Sammy?"

Samuel stood still. He looked at Matthew, then at the diamond, then again at Matthew.

"I find it rather a good example of a stone."

"He, he! Yes, it is rather a good example of a stone." Samuel resumed his pacing to and fro. "It's something to be the owner of such a stone, isn't it, Sammy? Look at it, Sammy, look at it now!"

Matthew was leaning over the side of his chair; his eyes were fixed upon his brother, but with his outstretched hand he pointed toward the stone. Samuel followed the direction of his brother's finger. He, too, looked at the stone.

The diamond was on the table. A singular thing had happened; one of those numerous singular things which were always happening. The diamond had not disappeared—for it was visible enough—but on it, or over it, for it was difficult to say if it actually touched it, was a figure—the figure of an ape.

Not of any recognized species of ape—it was not even the "missing link"—but it was an amazing kind of beast which bore, so far as form went, a fantastic resemblance to an ape. It was squatted on its haunches. Its hands were clasped about its belly. Its head was distinctly apelike. Its two eyes were fixed on Mr. Hookham, sparkling and flashing as though they themselves were diamonds.

But the most curious thing about this very curious creature was its coloring. It absolutely palpitated with color—not with one hue, but with all the hues of the rainbow—only the brilliancy of the rainbow was as nothing compared to the brilliancy of that strange creature.

As Mr. Hookham looked at it he saw the colors come and go, flash and vanish, one moment dazzling the eyes, the next becoming, in their subdued radiancy, and in the marvelous magic of their combinations, like the glorious dream of some great colorist.

Yet there was nothing beautiful about the creature—that is, if a thing of beauty *is* a joy even for a moment, or if every beautiful thing has its own peculiar charm. For there was nothing either joyous or charming about that fantastic caricature of a baboon, or ape, and that in spite of all its gloriously glittering array.

On the contrary, Mr. Hookham, as he looked at it, was conscious of a very strong feeling of disgust, of nausea; nay, more, he was conscious that its mere presence there made the whole room repulsive. Nor was the effect lessened by his brother's repetition of his words, in the tone which, metaphorically, went all down his back.

"Look at it now, Sammy, look at it now!"

Mr. Samuel Hookham did look at it, and he might have been excused if he had straightway turned tail and fled; it did fill him with such a dreadful sense of nauseous disgust. But, fortunately or unfortunately, he was made of different stuff. The dogged nature of the man would have forbidden him to turn tail even on the devil himself—and certainly forbade him to absolutely flee from one of his mere minions.

He went to the window, giving a wide berth to the table by the way. Flinging the casement open, he thrust his head out to get a breath of air.

The ape, if it was an ape, and Matthew, or Matthew's ghost, both followed him with their eyes. As he observed his brother's discomfiture, Matthew—or his ghost—became hideously jocose.

"He, he, he! What do you think of the diamond, Sammy; what do you think of it now?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVE THAT LIVED.

"Matt," said Samuel, at last, coming back into the room, his harsh voice seeming harsher than its wont, "would it please you to see me ruined?"

Matthew plainly thought the ques-

tion superfluous—the answer too self-evident. His mirth was quite hysterical.

"Please me!" he screamed; "why, I shall forget all I suffered in the pleasure!"

Mr. Samuel Hookham craned his head forward—somewhat in the fashion of the bird of prey which collects itself to dart upon its victim.

"Then you won't see it," he said.

"Oh, yes, I shall, Sammy—oh, yes, I shall!"

"You won't." Something in Samuel's voice seemed to avert Matthew's attention. He looked at his brother. "Shall I tell you why?"

"Oh, do, Sammy—do, do!"

"Because"—Mr. Samuel Hookham clearly enunciated his words, even paused between each—"because—I—shall—give—the—diamond—away."

Matthew's mirth became a little less pronounced.

"Give the diamond away?"

"Give the diamond away—to ruin some other fool as it ruined you."

"Oh, no, you won't! It's worth more than twenty thousand pounds, you know—more than twenty thousand pounds! That's what I used to say I'd do, but I never could when it came to the point; how much more impossible will it be for you!"

"Matt, you say I am a fool—well, I'll show you, at any rate, that I'm not so big a one as you. Were you aware of the peculiar properties of the stone?"

"Yes," said Matthew a little uneasily, "I knew them; that was almost the worst of it—I knew them all the time."

"And you still held on?" Samuel held his hands above his head with a gesture which was more eloquent than words. "What a fool!"

"I was not the first who knew of them and still held on. I was not the first fool, any more than you will be the last of them."

"Do you know what is one reason which would induce me to give it away, if there were not another in existence?"

"What reason's that?"

"For the sake of spiting you!"

"Spiting me?"

Matthew's complexion was becoming green again. All his merry humor was passing away. As Matthew's spirits became depressed, his affectionate brother's seemed to rise.

"For the sake of spiting you. You say it would give you pleasure to see me ruined. I've deprived you of many of your little pleasures before to-day, and now I'll deprive you of the greatest and the latest, the very last pleasure of them all. For that reason, if for no other, I'll give the diamond away, so that I may deprive you of the last pleasure that will ever come your way."

Matthew rubbed his hands together, and he chuckled; but the chuckle was a feeble one, and his hands trembled as he rubbed them.

"Oh, no, Sammy, you—you won't give the diamond away!"

"I will—and you know I will! I would if it were worth two hundred thousand pounds! And you'll never come to see the fun again, or, if you do, it will be fun, not from your point of view, but mine; you will come and see me rich and prosperous, the happiest of men—you will come and see me what you would have been, if you had not been a fool. Why, Matt, you're a fool even now you're dead—your ghost's a fool—or you never would have come to see the fun so soon. If I hadn't known—and I never should have known if I had not seen you with my eyes, and heard you with my ears—that you were watching me, enjoying yourself, rubbing your hands, chuckling all the time, I might have gone blundering, blundering on; for, as you say, more than twenty thousand pounds is a biggish sum to give away, even for a millionaire like myself. But now that I do know my pains and your pleasures, why, the bubble's blown! I prick it—it is gone. Ha, ha, ha! Why, Matt, even your ghost's a fool!"

While Mr. Samuel Hookham delivered himself to this effect in an energetic and even boisterous tone of voice, his brother's enjoyment did not seem to increase to any appreciable extent. He even shivered, as though Samuel's fraternal heartiness was almost more than he could bear. And though he still con-

tinued to rub his hands and chuckle, it was plainly not because his heart was merry, but rather because he had got into a groove, and seemed to experience some difficulty in getting out of it.

He had no effective retort ready to his lips even when Samuel's pausing did give him an opportunity to "hit him back."

"Oh, no, Sammy, you won't give the diamond away—you won't give it away!"

That was what he continued to say, as though he were a mechanical toy, only constructed to deliver itself of a given form of words.

Samuel's manner as he commenced to reply was in striking contrast to his brother's; he spoke very earnestly, holding out his hand as an orator does.

"I tell you, Matt, that so soon as you are gone——"

Matthew rose from his seat with a cry.

"Oh, Sammy, don't speak of that!"

Samuel seemed a little startled. He stared at his brother.

"Don't speak of what?"

"Don't speak of my going! For as soon as you speak of my going—I'm gone."

Samuel stared still harder. Then he threw his hands above his head with a laugh—a laugh which was even more discordant than his first had been. At the sound of it the creature on the table actually shuddered. Matthew shuddered, too.

"Why, Matt, as a ghost you're a greater fool even than before! Why didn't you tell me the trick of it at first? Did you think I wanted you to stay?" Samuel held out his hand in front of him again. "Why, Matt, I tell you that so soon as you are gone——"

Matthew gave a deprecatory gesture with his arms; but Samuel repeated his words—"so soon as you are gone—and may it be soon!—I'll give the diamond away!"

Samuel's voice had increased almost to a roar; but at the last word it sank into a whisper. For no sooner had he expressed his wish that Matthew would not stand upon the order of his going, than Matthew was gone!—vanishing like a flash of lightning before his eyes. While he continued staring at his brother with looks which were not looks of love, there was no brother to be stared at.

The disappearance was so sudden that at first Samuel thought he had been played a trick. He momentarily expected him to reappear behind his back or above his head, standing on his shoulders, for all he knew, a novel variety of the Old Man of the Sea—of whom, by the way, Mr. Samuel Hookham certainly had never heard. He remained motionless, gazing.

But as the moments passed, and nothing, and no one, came, he ventured to look round. He turned with a shudder, for he expected that his eyes would light upon the creature on the table. But he was agreeably disappointed; the creature was gone.

As he recognized this fact—that, so far as seeing went, he was alone in the room—he found himself in darkness. The tallow candle, it would almost seem with a rush at the last, had burned itself out.

CHAPTER XVII.

RESOLVED—AT LAST!

Mr. Samuel Hookham's position, "when the light went out," was not, from all points of view, an agreeable one.

To begin with, he was "in the dark"; and he was not only in the dark—which is never an agreeable thing to be in when one prefers the light—but he was in the dark without knowing if he were alone, or who his companions were, if he had any. He had just been in the presence of a ghost—as full-flavored a ghost as was ever visible to mortal eyes—and the ghost was accompanied by—well, by not a nice companion.

When a man has just seen the last of two such visitors he does not care to find himself all at once in the dark. A little light upon the subject—and the surrounding objects—would tend to make things clearer, and ease his mind.

When Mr. Samuel Hookham found

himself in the dark, the darkness was very complete, indeed: "Egyptian darkness"—from our childhood upward we hear so much about "Egyptian darkness"—which "you could cut with a knife"—like pease pudding, or, from the French point of view, a London fog. However, there was one spot of light. But whatever that spot of light may have done actually, metaphorically it certainly did not make things brighter; and in this "conjunction" metaphor was the stronger of the two; for that spot of light came from the diamond.

And it was hardly to be expected that, at that particular moment, the sight of the diamond should have made Mr. Samuel Hookham's heart feel lighter.

The worst of it was that Mr. Hookham's eyes were riveted by that spot of light. He could not take his glance away. Abstractly, it was beautiful. There was a mystic glamour about its glittering radiance—"light in the darkness"—which might have turned on the poetic tap in the case of a man who was "built" that way; but Mr. Hookham was not, and even if he had been, he had seen too much about the diamond—and too recently—to feel poetic, anyhow.

Even in the gloom he strained his eyes to see if the creature—the guardian, the evil genius, of the stone—was anywhere about. It was not a pleasant thing to know that it might be there—probably was—although he could not see it.

Nor was it any pleasanter to feel that Matthew's ghost was behind his back. So strong did this feeling presently become—that Matthew's ghost was there—that he turned, and cried aloud in the darkness:

"Matthew!"

But there was no answer, nor any sign that there was any there that heard. Still Mr. Samuel Hookham did not feel by any means easy in his mind.

"I'll go into the bedroom and see if I can't find a light; there must be something there, and I can't stop here in the dark."

He began to grope his way to his bedroom. But hardly had he moved than he came into violent contact with something—it was the armchair. The sudden shock made him utter a cry of alarm.

"Matthew," he asked, in what writers of the better class call a "sepulchral" whisper, "are you there?"

But if Matthew was there he did not mention it. He held his peace, allowing Samuel to call on him in vain. Mr. Samuel Hookham, as he rubbed his knee, which had come with undesirable force against the chair, could not but feel that if Matthew was there he was having one more moment of enjoyment, at any rate. As he thought of it he muttered maledictions beneath his breath. Then he pursued his voyage in search of his bedroom.

Finding the door, he groped for the handle. He turned it, with a hand which trembled slightly. He passed inside, he entered—there was outer darkness, too.

He felt his way to the chest of drawers. In one of the drawers—in that in which he kept his shirts and collars—he found what he was looking for, a piece of "composite" about a couple of inches long. It was one of his careful ways—a fresh illustration of the simplicity of millionaires—to keep his candle ends. He had kept this one for months—after long keeping it came in handy now. He routed out—from the same receptacle—a box of matches.

Lighting his piece of candle, he held it above his head—still with a hand which trembled. The room was empty. Returning into the adjoining chamber, that, so far as he could see with his finite vision, was empty, too.

He put the piece of candle down upon the table. Standing close behind it, he commenced to rub his hands as Matthew had done—only not so cheerily. He kept giving furtive glances round him.

"I wonder," he asked himself, beneath his breath, "if Matthew's here?"

He was by no means certain he was not. Such an uncertainty was not a pleasant one. The simplest of millionaires does not bear himself—does not wish to bear himself—in the presence

of a spectator, even though that spectator is a brother's ghost, as he would do were he quite alone. But as Mr. Samuel Hookham had no means of making sure—the Psychical Research Society not having yet suggested a process of testing for the presence of ghosts—he was obliged to make the best of it. He turned to the diamond.

There it lay, in its tranquil, glittering beauty—which has been so often spoken of before.

"The ape!" said Mr. Hookham.

As he spoke of the ape he shuddered, and glanced round the room again. He went to the window, which was still open, and looked out. He leaned his arms upon the sill.

The only thing visible without was the flickering lamp in the court below; but even that, seen through the misty haze, gave him the feeling of society. He was not alone while the lamp was there. He could hear, too, as he listened, the subdued rumble of the Fleet Street traffic.

But, although the time was summer, the night was cool. A chilly air came from the river.

He shivered, and returned into the room. Yet he was loath to close the window, being reluctant to lose the companionship of the lamp. Shrugging his shoulders, he told himself he was a fool—it will be observed that the epithet was one to whose use he was addicted; it was the one measure of his standard of right and wrong.

Pulling the window to with a bang, he fastened the latch. Turning, he allowed his eyes to rest for a moment on the stone.

Then he began, as he had done before the advent of his visitors, to pace to and fro, up and down, and round and round the room. He recalled all that had happened to him since the arrival of the stone—all, down to the minutest detail.

And as, in his mind's eye, he went through it all over again, his anger began to rise. He began to lose his sense of awe. The feeling of personal injury became strong within him. All at once it became so strong that, pausing, he shook his clinched fist at the stone upon the table. And he muttered—something that was not a prayer.

Matthew's visit was the climax of it all. To think that his brother was dead, and yet could come to life again, to gibe and jeer at him—the thought was insupportable! Better ruin almost than that! For all he knew, Matthew's ghost, in some invisible form—for who can tell of what forms such ghosts are capable?—was actually present and chuckling at him now. The reflection stung him to fury.

If the retaining of the diamond in his possession involved such a persecution—better that the first beggar he met in the street should be its owner rather than he!

He snatched up the stone from the table. How cool it felt to the touch! How beautiful it was! How it gleamed and glittered! How it concentrated in itself such a radiance of light! How large it was! Was ever such a stone before? It was worth the ransom of a king!

Involuntarily two words rose to his lips.

"The ape!" he said.

As he said it, he shuddered. He arrived at a sudden resolution. He closed his account book, locked its two locks, and slipped it into his breast coat pocket. He took up his hat and put it on. He opened the two doors, first the inner, then the outer one. He blew out the candle, putting a box of matches in his pocket. Then he went out, locking the door behind him as he went, pocketing the key.

All the time he held the diamond in his hand. He meant to give it to the first beggar he met in the street.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING A RECIPIENT FOR A GIFT OF A FORTUNE.

An opportunity immediately presented itself to put his resolution into practice, as, when we have formed resolutions, opportunities often do. A man was

crouching against the wall at the entrance to the court. Mr. Hookham paused and looked at him.

"Go away!" said the man. "Get along away with yer! I'm waiting for a friend."

In spite of the uncertain light, Mr. Hookham immediately recognized the speaker—it was his laundress' "pore James"—the "pore James" who, according to his fond mother, was "doing time"; the very man who, Mr. Hookham suspected, in his absence, had ransacked his rooms.

As he glared at him, rage for a moment made Mr. Hookham speechless. Either "pore James" was a much-wronged man, or else his presence there showed that he was possessed of an amount of impudence which was quite refreshing—only Mr. Hookham did not seem to think that it was at all refreshing then.

He appeared about, for this occasion only, to hold the scales, and treat "pore James" to an illustration of "justice" which was not "law." Only for the moment he stayed his hand.

One thing was clear—Mr. Clisby had been drinking, not wisely, but too well. He was just sober enough to stand—with the help of the wall. By degrees there began to dawn on his muddled faculties a vague impression that he had seen the person in front of him somewhere before. At last he settled his identity to his apparent satisfaction.

"Strike me lucky!" he murmured; "it's 'Ookham!"

"Yes," said Mr. Hookham, mimicking "pore James," "it's 'Ookham. You scoundrel! What are you doing here?"

"I—I'm waiting for a friend."

Mr. Hookham looked Mr. Clisby up and down. A thought was germinating in his mind. How could he punish him better, to begin with, than by presenting him with the Devil's Diamond? Afterward, when the diamond had done with him, if there was anything of him left to punish, he might punish him by process of law.

"You have committed a burglary in my chambers."

"O-only a little thing," hiccuped Mr. Clisby, who was evidently one of those whom drink makes confidential, "along o' my mother."

"Oh, your mother had a hand in it, did she?" Mr. Hookham sincerely hoped that she might have a hand in handling the diamond. "With what I know against you, I might, if I chose, get you penal servitude for life."

"What's the odds if you do?" asked Mr. Clisby, with sublime indifference to the terrors of the law.

"But I'm in a merciful mood tonight." Mr. Hookham spoke with such bitter irony that one would have thought that it must have been even perceptible to the drink-sodden wretch in front of him. "I not only forgive you, but I'm going to make you a present of more than twenty thousand pounds."

"Pore James" lurched away from the wall, almost falling into Mr. Hookham's arms.

"What's that?" he said.

"I say that I'm going to make you a present of over twenty thousand pounds."

"Don't come playing the softy over me."

"I'm doing nothing of the kind. Do you see that diamond?"

Mr. Hookham held it out between his finger and thumb. Mr. Clisby looked at it with his drink-blurred eyes.

"Give us hold on it!' he said. He held out his hand to take it, but a sudden lurch against the wall somewhat destroyed his purpose.

"You shall have it. It is worth more than twenty thousand pounds."

"Stow it!" hiccuped Mr. Clisby.

"It is a fact, as you may ascertain for yourself by taking it to any receiver of stolen goods of your acquaintance. It's worth more than twenty thousand pounds—infinitely more than those jewels of mine which you have stolen, and the proceeds of which you are devoting to bringing on an attack of delirium tremens. I give it you freely. Take it. It is yours."

Mr. Hookham held out the diamond to Mr. Clisby; but "pore James" did not rise to the bait with so much enthusi-

asm as Mr. Hookham had expected. He seemed a little shy.

"Why don't you take it?" repeated Mr. Hookham. "It is yours. Are you too drunk to understand what I am saying? I say that it is worth more than twenty thousand pounds."

As Mr. Hookham continued to hold out the diamond, and "pore James" continued to hesitate, there came a sound as of something falling on the pavement. Mr. Hookham looked down; something yellow was lying at his feet —it was a sovereign.

With a degree of alacrity which was a little surprising in one who was presenting to a confirmed criminal and an habitual drunkard a gift of the value of more than twenty thousand pounds, he stooped down to pick it up.

As he did so, another fell—it seemed to him that it fell from the diamond—and then another, and another; he kept his eyes upon the stone, and he distinctly saw that they fell from the diamond. There they were, a little heap of bright sovereigns, gleaming pleasantly as they lay upon the ground. Mr. Hookham began to pick them up.

But, by this time, "pore James" was also alive to the fact that something unusual was going on. He, too, had heard the ringing of coin, than which few sounds were sweeter to his ears; nor was he too drunk to observe the fact of Mr. Hookham's suddenly stooping down.

"What's up?" he hiccuped.

He joined Mr. Hookham in stooping down to see. He was not, however, sober enough to stoop down neatly. He came down, so to speak, with a run—a run which landed him on the top of Mr. Hookham.

Mr. Clisby was a young man, but he was constructed on a generous scale, and he was heavy—particularly so when drunk. Mr. Hookham collapsed beneath him like a pack of cards. He lay flat on the ground, and Mr. Clisby lay on top of him, using language which seemed to infer that he was under the erroneous impression that he was not the aggressor but the aggrieved.

Mr. Hookham seemed to think that Mr. Clisby had added to his other crimes an attempt to commit robbery with violence.

"Help! Thieves! Police!" he screamed, as loudly as he could with the small quantity of breath Mr. Clisby had still left in him.

A constable came round the corner, with three or four stragglers at his heels.

"What's up here?" he asked.

A policeman always asks that question—just as a cabman, who is dissatisfied because he has not been paid more than twice his legal fare, always demands: "What's this?"—as if he didn't know.

Having asked this question, the policeman proceeded to supply the answer by seizing Mr. Clisby by the collar of his coat, and dragging him to his feet. Then Mr. Hookham got up, too.

"My name is Hookham," he explained. "This man's name is James Clisby. I have chambers here. He has robbed them, burglariously. Now he has attempted to rob me, with violence."

Mr. Clisby seemed subdued. Perhaps, after the manner of some of his kind, he felt safe in the arms of the police. The constable screwed his captive round to the light. A flattering recognition of "pore James" immediately ensued.

"Oh, it's you, is it? It's not the first time I've had hold of you. Do you charge him, sir?"

"Certainly I charge him."

A second constable now came. "Pore James'" prospects did not look roseate.

"Is that your money lying on the ground, sir?" asked constable Number 2.

Mr. Hookham said that it was. The diamond was lying on the ground as well; he stooped and picked it up, and with it twelve sovereigns, too. Mr. Clisby was borne away, supported by the friendly arms of the two gentlemen in blue, an admiring throng following on his heels.

Mr. Hookham was left alone.

He had the diamond still in his hand, and the twelve sovereigns, too. He

made a movement as if to slip them into his pocket, but something in the feel of them caused him to pause. Stretching out his hand, holding it open in the light, he looked at its contents.

He must have been mistaken—there were no sovereigns there; he held a handful of dirt. He threw it from him with an oath, and went out into the street to look for a more worthy recipient of his princely generosity.

The multitude had gone with Mr. Clisby; but one man remained behind. He came up now to Mr. Hookham, touching his ragged apology for a cap. It was Larry, the "caretaker" of Badger's Buildings—he who had brought to Mitre Court the first news of the fire.

"Mr. 'Ookham, sir, will you give me a copper, sir? All my sticks was burned in the fire, sir, and these two days I ain't 'ad a drop to eat nor drink."

Here was a fresh opportunity for Mr. Hookham to bestow his splendid charity! The man looked miserable enough. He was a picturesque conglomeration of rags—picturesque from the artist's point of view, if not from the wearer's—and he was shivering as with cold.

"Give you a copper?" said Mr. Hookham, in response to the man's appeal. "Why, you drunken beast! it was through you the buildings were burned; you robbed me of five hundred pounds a year."

"'Ope I may die, Mr. 'Ookham, sir, you're wrong! I was as sober that afternoon——"

"As you are now," observed Mr. Hookham, cutting him short.

"God knows I'm sober now."

"Sober!" Mr. Hookham caught him by the arm. "Why, you've got the 'shakes' this very moment. I suppose you'll tell me it's with hunger or with cold? It's the drink—drink, you brute!"

"You're a 'ard man, Mr. 'Ookham, sir."

"You think I'm a hard man, do you?" Mr. Hookham paused. He looked the fellow closely in the face. "What would you say if I were to make your fortune?"

"You might do it, sir, and yet never feel the want of it, that's sure and safe enough."

"Suppose I were to give you more than twenty thousand pounds?"

The man looked furtively up and down the misty street. The hour was getting late. That part of Fleet Street was pretty well deserted; yet he instinctively drew more into the shadow of the wall.

"You're joking, Mr. 'Ookham, sir."

"Did you ever know me joke?"

"I can't say rightly, sir, I ever did."

"Then, take my word for it, I'm not joking now. Do you see that?" Mr. Hookham held out the diamond—as he had done in his brief interview with Mr. Clisby—between his thumb and finger. "Do you know what that is?"

Larry shook his head.

"That's a diamond."

"A diamond, is it?"

Larry sighed.

"That's one of the finest diamonds in the world. It's worth the ransom of a king—more than twenty thousand pounds."

"That's a 'eap of money, sir, for a little thing like that."

"It is a heap of money, yet what I tell you is true. You ask me for a copper. I give you this. Take it." Mr. Hookham held out the diamond, but Larry shrank away. "What's the matter with the fool? Why don't you take it?"

"I don't think, sir, diamonds is in my way."

"What do you mean—in your way? Aren't twenty thousand pounds in your way?—and you could get it for that diamond to-morrow."

"I don't know where I'm going to get it from, unless it's from the landlord o' the 'Dun Cow.' And he wouldn't give it me, that I swear. More like to bash me with a pewter." Larry sighed again. "And—Mr. 'Ookham?"

"Well?"

"If it's worth all that you say, how comes it, Mr. 'Ookham, sir, you wants to give it me?"

There was a sound—very much like a ripple of musical laughter—which seemed to come from the stone.

"What's that?" said Larry.

"I don't know what it is. Do you hear what I tell you? Take the diamond, you fool!"

Larry shrank away.

"If it's all the same to you, sir, I'd rather not."

Mr. Hookham seized him by the shoulder.

"Look here, my man, if you don't take this diamond I'll give you into custody for setting fire to Badger's Buildings! Now, are you going to take it, or am I to summon the police?"

Larry looked furtively around. Then he bent forward, almost whispering in Mr. Hookham's ear:

"Mr. 'Ookham, sir, did yer nick it?"

Mr. Hookham started back.

"Nick it! Do you take me for a thief?"

"Well, sir, I don't rightly know, but I do know this—if it's worth anything like the 'arf of what you say it is, nor yet the quarter, nor yet tuppence, unless there's something uncommon queer about it, you wouldn't want to give it me, I know you too well for that."

Again there came the sound which they had heard before—like the ripple of musical laughter. Again it seemed to come from the stone. Larry crossed himself.

"What's that?" he gasped. Mr. Hookham could see that he was shivering even more than he had been before—this time with a different kind of "shakes." "I do believe the devil's in the thing!"

No sooner had the words been spoken —which they were with a degree of earnestness which was ludicrous even —than there rang out, through the misty air of Fleet Street, what was surely one of the most musical bursts of laughter which ever yet was heard. There was no mistake about it this time, for it lasted both loud and long. Mr. Hookham stared at the diamond in dumb amazement.

Long before the laughter ceased, Larry was out of sight. At the first round of that laughter he had fairly taken to his heels and fled.

As Mr. Hookham walked toward the Strand, he began to realize that it might not, from the very nature of things, be easy to give away a diamond worth more than twenty thousand pounds. Where he was now a stream of people was continually passing by. He could not stop the first and say:

"Here's a diamond! Take it—with my blessing."

Larry had suggested he had "nicked" it. The stranger might make the same suggestion in a more disagreeable fashion still.

As Mr. Hookham got further into the Strand he found it peopled with the usual variegated multitude which crowds that thoroughfare at night. The throng was a little thinner, perhaps, than it generally is on a summer night, for the elements were unpropitious, but still there were enough and to spare. He passed on. There were some boys selling the latest editions of the evening papers.

"The Sphinx's Cave Mystery! The Devil's Diamond Performs in Court!"

The words fell on Mr. Hookham's ears like shot corns. There was a tiny urchin dancing about on the curbstone like a demon in the pantomime. He had a bundle of papers under his arm. Seeing Mr. Hookham pause, the lad thrust a paper into his hand.

" 'Ere yer har, sir!" The words were gabbled with the orthodox rapidity. "Hextra! Speshil!"

Mr. Hookham felt in his pockets for a coin. They were empty. He had come out penniless.

"I don't want your paper," he said.

He turned down one of the streets which lead from the Strand to the river, slinking along it as though he were a fugitive from justice. What was he to do with the accursed stone?

He reached the Embankment. The cool air from the river whispered past his cheeks. A thought suddenly occurred to him—a thought which seemed to him as though it were an inspiration. Why not give the diamond to the river? Why not present it, with

his love, to the guardian of the waters?

He paused. He leaned on the stone parapet. He looked out across the stream.

A policeman sauntered by, eying him keenly as he passed. He apparently suspected him of harboring nefarious designs—possibly of suffering from an attack of suicidal mania, and of an intention to take advantage of the foggy night.

Mr. Hookham was conscious of a wild impulse urging him to give the stone to the policeman, but experience had taught him that it would be unwise to yield to such an impulse as that.

He poised the diamond on the center of the palm of his hand.

"I give you to the river!"

He hurled it, with all his force, out over the misty waste of waters. It gave a little scream, as of rage, as it passed through the air. Then he heard it fall, with a splash, into the stream.

CHAPTER XIX.

GIVEN—TO WHOM?

There were several visitors to Mr. Hookham's chambers in Mitre Court during the course of the following day. But all of these went away, if not mourning, then, at least, without having attained the object of their coming, for Mr. Hookham was invisible. The oak was sported, and no amount of hammering produced the slightest effect. If Mr. Hookham was at home, it was not to visitors.

The same thing happened on the next day; people came and went dissatisfied away. Only on that day a card was affixed, in a prominent position, to the oak, on which was written:

Mr. Samuel Hookham will be at home to-morrow.

On that morrow, at a quite matutinal and most unfashionable hour, certain visitors returned again; there were two of them, M. and Madame Nurvetchky. Young as the day was, the oak, unsported, stood hospitably open. A tap upon the panel of the inner door produced an invitation—from within—to enter. M. and Madame Nurvetchky entered.

The room was not at all in the condition in which we saw it last. It was as neat as it was possible, with the appliances Mr. Hookham had at hand, to make it. All the débris had disappeared, everything was in its proper place, the spirit of order permeated the apartment.

Still, in spite of that, it was not a cheerful room, even for the simplest of millionaires, and although, in some mysterious way, a ray of sunshine had straggled though the casement.

Mr. Hookham was seated at the oak table—which table was neatly arranged in due and decorous order. He was writing. As his visitors entered he looked up at them.

It was immediately apparent that his appearance had improved with the appearance of the room. His clothes were certainly not of the latest fashion, either as regards cut, hue or texture. Nor were they exactly new. But they were neat and tidy.

For one thing, he had had a wash. His hands were clean, his hair was decently brushed and parted at the side, his boots were blacked, so much of his shirt and collar as was visible evinced a quite recent acquaintance with the tender mercies of a laundress—a genuine laundress, not one of "pore James' " mother's stamp.

Madame Nurvetchky entered with a radiant smile—that charming smile which she seemed to be able to summon up at will. She advanced to Mr. Hookham with both hands held out.

Laying down his pen, without rising from his seat, Mr. Hookham contented himself with very gingerly touching one.

"How do you do, Madame Nurvetchky?" His voice was cold, quiet and self-possessed—the voice of the Mr. Hookham who used to be in prehistoric times. He nodded to the lady's husband, who, as usual, seemed more than half asleep, and not nearly so radiant as his wife.

"How do *you* do?" exclaimed the lady. "My dear friend, these two days we came to have a peep at you, and these two days we went broken-hearted away."

"Indeed!"

Mr. Hookham passed his hand across his chin in a casual kind of way. Evidently the lady's broken heart had no interest for him. She went radiantly on.

"Do you know that you have reached the topmost pinnacle of fame?"

"Fame? I see some libels in the papers"—Mr. Hookham laid his hand on a pile of neatly folded newspapers which was at his side—"if you call that fame."

"Libels! Why, the newspapers are full of nothing else but you. Is that not to be famous? What, then, do you call fame?"

"I am afraid I am not good at definitions. You will find a dictionary somewhere in the room."

"May I come in?" The door was opened again. Some one put his head in. It was Mr. Leicester. His request not being answered by an immediate negative, he took silence for consent, and entered. "Mr. Hookham, I am glad to see you. On each of the last two days I have endeavored to do so, but each time I found you were invisible."

Mr. Hookham did not answer—he merely nodded his head. Madame Nurvetchky turned to Mr. Leicester.

"I have been telling our friend that the newspapers have made him famous, and he talks of libel!"

"Fame, from a newspaper point of view, is sometimes synonymous with libel." Mr. Leicester turned from the lady to address himself to Mr. Hookham. "Has the diamond favored you with any further manifestations?"

"Oh, the dear diamond!" cried the lady, and she clasped her hands.

"Has it materialized again?"

"Mr. Hookham, we are in treaty for Olympia; we have arranged for letter blocks twelve feet in height—'The Devil's Diamond'—just those three words, no more. When shall we announce its reappearance? This week, or next? We only wait for a word from you to have everything *en train.*"

Mr. Hookham had been bending over what he had been writing. He now looked up with a little start, as though he had not been paying attention to what was being said.

"Of what are you speaking?"

"Of the Devil's Diamond—the dear, dear diamond!"

"The Devil's Diamond?" Mr. Hookham knit his brows, as though he were endeavoring to recall something to his mind. "Do you allude to that stone I had?"

"Stone you had!" cried Mr. Leicester.

"Stone you had!" exclaimed madame.

M. Nurvetchky ran his fingers through his mustache, as another man, a commonplace person, runs his fingers through his hair. Mr. Percy Leicester leaned over the table; he was evidently in an agitated frame of mind.

"Have you lost it?"

"Was it stolen?" screamed madame.

Mr. Hookham leaned back in his chair. He was evidently quite at his ease, and apparently not much interested, either.

"Lost? No, no. Nor was it stolen. I gave it away."

"Gave it away?" chorused his three visitors, as it were with a single breath—this time even M. Nurvetchky found his voice.

"Yes," repeated Mr. Hookham, quietly, as though he were a trifle bored, "I gave it away."

Mr. Percy Leicester, who seemed to have lost his equilibrium for once in a way, caught Mr. Hookham by the shoulder.

"Whom did you give it to?" he asked.

"I am afraid you ask more than I can tell you."

"More than you can tell me? Do you mean that you gave it to a stranger?"

"A perfect stranger."

"Where? Here? Or in the street?"

"In the street."

The trio of visitors looked at each other in profound amazement. Their

number had been recruited by the arrival of two more. Mr. Fairlight and Mr. Schwabe had come in together. Mr. Fairlight now came forward.

"So you have given it away? I have looked in on my way to the office. The best thing you could do with it."

Mr. Schwabe also advanced. He slapped his friend, in his hearty way, upon the back.

"The best thing you could have done with it, Hookham, my boy; I wish the present owner joy of it, although it is worth more than twenty thousand pounds!"

But Mr. Leicester did not seem to be at all of the same mind.

"I shall advertise for the present owner to apply to me. To allow such a stone to be lost to the cause of scientific inquiry would be a crime unparalleled in history."

"I don't think," observed Mr. Fairlight, "you need advertise for the owner. If the stone maintains its character, I should say that, very shortly, he will advertise himself."

"But—consider!" Madame Nurvetchky stretched out her arms in that expressive and excitable way she had. "It is not to be believed! We are pledged to produce the Devil's Diamond! We are in treaty for Olympia! We have already ordered the letter blocks twelve feet in height! What, then, is to become of us?"

She paused for a reply. For some moments there was none forthcoming. Then Mr. Hookham gently shook his head, and half closed his eyes—as though the subject was wholly without attractions for him.

"I am not good at riddles," he said.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. HOOKHAM PREPARES HIS FUN SOME DISTANCE IN ADVANCE.

When his visitors had gone—and there were quite a number of dramatic little scenes before they went—Mr. Hookham returned to his writing. He was writing something on a sheet of blue foolscap paper. When he had finished he read what he had written, revising and correcting as he read. Then he made a clean copy of the "revise" on another sheet of paper. When he had done that, laying down his pen, he leaned back in his chair.

This is what he had written:

£20,000.—Lost: A Diamond! On the night of Wednesday, the fifth of July, 18—, I, Samuel Hookham, threw into the River Thames a diamond. The diamond is known as the "Devil's Diamond," and is of the value of more than twenty thousand pounds. I was standing on the Embankment, in front of the Savoy Hotel. I tossed it, as I judge, straight in front of me, a distance of some thirty feet. It was at half tide, and the tide was coming in. I desire, after I am dead, that this advertisement shall appear, daily, in four of the leading papers, until the diamond is found. And I further desire that the finder, on presenting himself at the office of the undermentioned firm of solicitors, with the diamond, shall be paid the sum of one hundred pounds weekly, so long as it remains in his possession. A clause will be found in my will setting apart for that special purpose a sum sufficient to make such payments.

Mr. Hookham picked up from the table the sheet of blue foolscap paper, and contemplated it with what was, apparently, considerable satisfaction.

"I'll sign it, and have it witnessed. And when I'm dead it shall appear, regularly, in the papers. Plenty of fools will soon set about looking for the stone. When one of them has found it, as Matthew said he'd do, I'll come back and see the fun. Only I'll do the thing more cleverly than Matt—I won't spoil myself by showing my hand. Properly managed, I ought to have quite a lively time."

Mr. Hookham laid down the paper again, and rubbed his hands softly—one against the other. The spasm which distorted his saturnine visage was possibly intended for a smile. But then his idea of a smile was about on a par with what seemed to be his idea of a lively time.

THE END.

The Confessions of a Hotel Manager

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Great Mogul," "The Wings of the Morning," Etc.

[NOTE.—The great modern hostelry, with its small army of servants and its hundreds of guests, most of whom are virtually unknown to the management, is sometimes the scene of strange happenings, though the public seldom hears of them, for such notoriety is not desired by the proprietor. This series of stories by Mr. Louis Tracy, an English author whose work is well and favorably known on both sides of the Atlantic, is based on events which have actually occurred, though, for obvious reasons, it has been found necessary to conceal the identity of both people and places.—THE EDITOR.]

IV.—A FASHIONABLE ANARCHIST

(*A Complete Story*)

IT needs a close acquaintance with hotel life to enable the most observant of guests to realize the strange medley of human beings that a manager has to deal with.

Take your own knowledge, for instance.

You cannot have lived long in any hotel without the necessity arising for a confidential chat with the manager.

It may have been a trivial thing, or a matter seriously affecting your career. Whatever it was, the hotel proprietor's help or sympathy was claimed and, let us hope, given.

Now, multiply your own case by the four hundred other inhabitants of a big modern establishment, and you have a fair idea of the curious happenings in such places, all of which are known to the manager, yet probably quite hidden from all save those personally concerned.

This little disquisition is apropos of the fact that, when Mr. Bohn returned from his vacation in the South, there was a change, slight but perceptible, in his manner toward me.

He left England strong in the belief that the Park Lane Hotel would suffer by his absence.

For that reason, I suppose, he placed full confidence in me! Anyhow, he returned to find a board of directors delighted with me, and a quarterly statement showing five thousand pounds' increase on the corresponding period in the previous year.

Now, Mr. Bohn was a marvel in kitchen economy, and, with a certain class of patrons, he was far superior to me. He could fool people into the opinion that the chicken so successful in the casserole was specially bred under his fostering eye, and that the excellent bottle of '89 vintage had been carefully selected for consumption at that moment.

But in the larger affairs of life he fell short. For instance, he distrusted me, thought me an upstart plotting for his place, and forthwith refused me his confidence.

Of course I was sorry; and I will not deny that I resented my dethronement,

This series began in the June issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

as, instead of being treated as the deputy manager, I became something lower than the head waiter.

It was a pity, for both of us, and it led to a climax.

I noticed that at the hours when new guests might be expected—after the arrival of the chief continental trains and the Liverpool steamer specials, for instance—Mr. Bohn managed to find me some task upstairs or in the offices.

By that means I made no new acquaintances.

So marked was this trick of his that I saved him trouble by suggesting work which would achieve his object.

Thus it happened that Baron van Gelden, a German with a Dutch title, became an inmate of the hotel without my knowledge.

He was in the place several days before I knew him by name, although I had noticed him by reason of his air of reserve. He was a man who absolutely shunned society. The elevator man told me the baron would adopt any dodge of loitering or seeming preoccupation rather than travel with other passengers.

He occupied a very expensive suite, and was so fastidious that he purchased several additional articles of furniture, though the directors had recently paid one West End firm an account of forty thousand pounds for new equipment.

But the baron went away one afternoon, hardly a week after his advent.

The floor valet, when questioned, said that all the visiting guest's clothes and linen, boots, etc., had gone with him, but the new furniture—a writing desk, a small corner cupboard, a Persian rug, a large old-fashioned grandfather's clock with a brass face, and other articles—remained *in situ*.

Of course I assumed that he was simply paying a visit to some place in the country; so you may judge my surprise when, that evening, his excellency Count von Heidenfeldt, the famous German minister, whose mission in life was the crushing of the Berlin socialists, arrived at the hotel and was solemnly ushered to the baron's vacant suite.

The thing came to my knowledge while I was dressing for dinner. I hurried over my toilet and found Mr. Bohn.

"Do you know," I asked, "that Baron van Gelden has left a good deal of his private furniture in the rooms now occupied by Count Heidenfeldt?"

Mr. Bohn smiled pleasantly.

"There is little that goes on in this hotel which escapes my knowledge," he said.

Now, I could have disabused his mind on that point, but I refrained. I merely bowed. It was nothing to me if the baron returned and made trouble on finding his belongings in the service of another man.

At half-past two in the morning, when Mr. Bohn was in bed—where I had been since soon after midnight—the hotel, or, at any rate, one of its main corridors, was alarmed by a pistol shot.

It brought a lot of anxious men and terrified women from their rooms, while those who were too scared to open their doors created enough din of electric bells to awaken the seven sleepers.

Among the scantily clad crowd which surged into the corridor was his excellency the minister.

"*Himmel!*" he roared. "I haf been shod ad in my bet. Der door was locked, look you. I unlocked id to ged oud, und der room was embdy. Id musd haf bin der devil!"

When Mr. Bohn and I came on the scene we managed to persuade most people to go back to bed, strong in the assurance that there would be no more shooting in the presence of such an array of the hotel staff as was gathered in that wing.

Then we entered the count's suite.

The first room was a spacious sitting room, from which the bedroom opened. Beyond this were a dressing room and bathroom.

These latter were in darkness, but elsewhere the electric lights were turned on fully—by the count's own action, he assured us.

He was not at all nervous. He told us that he had retired to rest about one o'clock, and had been sound asleep.

The only warning he received of a murderous attack being made on him

was the loud report which had aroused so many others.

Indeed, he would have been certain that the weapon was not discharged in his room at all, had he not been conscious, in a dreamy manner, of the bright flash of the burning powder.

Even this he might have distrusted as a bit of realistic fancy had he not smelled the fumes and seen the smoke as he switched on the electric light.

There was still more convincing testimony to hand.

The wainscot in one part of the room bore the deep gash of a bullet.

One could perceive instantly that the leaden pellet, in taking a downward direction, had imbedded itself to the depth of an inch or more.

Yet there could not be the slightest doubt that the suite contained no other occupant than the sleeping man.

We searched most thoroughly. The count was positive his door was locked on the inside.

"I keep it fastened on account of the valuable papers in my possession," he said, in German. "A man like me is liable to be shadowed by international spies, and such gentry are nearly always expert thieves. Therefore, I guard myself. Further, I always sleep with a revolver under my pillow."

"May I see it?" I asked.

It occurred to me that the dignitary might have used his own pistol in the course of an abnormal nightmare.

He guessed my suspicion. He pointed out, quite pleasantly, that the bore was clean and the six chambers loaded.

Suddenly I noticed an odd thing—the bed was not in its usual place. The fact seemed to be important, but here again the count bluntly disconcerted me.

"I always sleep with my head to the north," he said. "It may be fancy, but I certainly sleep better when lying parallel to the axis of the earth's revolution. So I moved the bed myself."

The incident was wholly inexplicable, and, therefore, unnerving. In these days one does not credit such occurrences to supernatural agency. There are so many chemical and electrical devices that will mystify the ordinary man that we might have been inclined to attribute the whole affair to a somewhat far-fetched joke, had it not been for the presence of the ominous bullet in the solid wood.

After a most painstaking scrutiny of the suite—when even the bedclothes were stripped and the wire mattress examined for an infernal machine—we reluctantly admitted that the thing was beyond our comprehension.

Von Heidenfeldt was really a philosopher.

He announced his intention of going to sleep again, and refused the escort of one of the hotel firemen.

"It is evident," he said, "that some trick was played with the lock. I see there is a bolt as well. I will use it in future. And we are not fools. The place certainly does not harbor any hidden enemy now. I will be asleep in five minutes."

Begging us not to report the affair to the police, he turned us out.

Mr. Bohn, who was pallid and worn-looking, invited me to his room. He opened a small bottle.

"What do you make of it, Mr. White?" he asked, and the new friendliness of his tone made me forget the little unpleasantness of the past few days.

I had no theory to offer.

"Don't you think we ought to send for Mr. Brent?" I ventured.

Now, that was the worst thing I could have said. Mr. Bohn, being in truth a small-minded man, knew that the barrister was an intimate friend of the chairman of directors.

He dreaded lest an unfavorable view should be taken of his management—you will recollect that hotel directors do, indeed, hold the manager responsible for everything—and he curtly declined the suggestion.

Practically, there was no development until the noble count was fired at again at half-past two next morning.

If anything, there was greater uproar than on the previous occasion.

Von Heidenfeldt was thoroughly enraged now. He was lying awake, thinking of the queer features of the previous

night's attack, when suddenly he heard a click behind him.

Before he could turn his head there was a vivid flash, a terrific report and another bullet was imbedded in the wainscot.

Now there could be no doubt whatever that the door was both locked and bolted.

When Mr. Bohn and I arrived we found the corridor thick with bewildered people. Fortunately, none of them had succeeded in entering the haunted suite.

A fireman, specially stationed on that floor, heard the report, and was knocking at the count's door before the amazed dignitary had time to unfasten it.

I must confess that I was more than ever inclined to believe that the seeming victim of the outrage was the author of it, but it was ridiculous to persist in that view when one heard his language.

The German tongue reaches sublime heights on such occasions, and Von Heidenfeldt was an expert.

I had a new note in my voice when I told Mr. Bohn that I was going, then and there, to arouse Mr. Brent and ask him to help us.

My chief did not raise any further objection. I think his thin hair was becoming a more pronounced shade of gray each minute.

I caused some excitement in Victoria Street before I gained admittance to Mr. Brent's flat.

Once inside, however, I quickly interested him, and by half-past three he was standing, with the rest of us, in the count's chambers.

He listened in silence to the brief information we had to give.

The most obvious fact was that the chance moving of Von Heidenfeldt's bed had alone saved him from a serious, if not fatal, wound.

"In other words," said my friend, with that quick disregard of unimportant details which characterized all his utterances, "the would-be assassin planned an outrage to suit the lines of a room familiar to him. He does not reside in the hotel now, or he would have learned, in all probability, how it was that the first bullet missed its intended mark."

Now, I said the fact was obvious, but we had all overlooked the deduction. Most schoolboys learn that if A equals B, and B equals C, therefore A equals C, but how seldom do we apply the principle in the affairs of life?

"Both shots," he went on, "came from the same direction. Indeed, they were fired from the clock!"

The others thought he was amusing himself. I knew better. Mr. Brent was merely thinking aloud.

He went to the clock and opened it. We had all examined it before, in common with every other article in the room.

There was seemingly nothing in the interior save the usual arrangements of heavy weights and pendulum.

He looked inside, even put his head in, and, not being satisfied, lit a match and peered upward into the works.

Then he stopped the pendulum.

"I do not wish to alarm the hotel," he announced, briskly, "or I would cause it to fire another round, just to convince you. It is the most ingenious device I have ever seen. I cannot be certain until it is taken to pieces by a clever workman in the morning, but I feel very confident that the powerful revolver fixed in the interior is worked by an eccentric wheel, which misses each alternate twelve hours' revolution, and thus causes the weapon to explode at half-past two in the morning."

"Sapristi!" said the count.

"Exactly. It must be most disturbing. The barrel fits into one of the two holes in the face. Why should an eight-day grandfather's clock, wound up by pulleys, have keyholes in the face?"

We were too amazed to speak.

"How did the thing gain admittance to the hotel?" he inquired, glancing from me to Mr. Bohn.

The later grew more pale, if that were possible.

"His excellency's wife——" he began.

"Vat!" shouted Von Heidenfeldt. "I am nod marrit."

"Then who is the Baron von Gelden?" stammered my unfortunate superior.

"I haf never heard of him until dis momend," cried the count.

Poor Mr. Bohn! He was compelled to tell us a rigmarole of the solicitude betrayed by the count's wife for the comfort of her better half; how she had sent her nephew, the baron, from Berlin, to see that his suite was made thoroughly comfortable and all things procured to his liking.

But the count, being choleric, resented this domestic interference in business matters, so the baron's presence must be kept a secret.

In a word, Mr. Bohn had actively connived in a socialist plot to rid the German Empire of a powerful minister, who thought that the sun shone because the Hohenzollerns reigned, and now he was obliged to admit that he had actually refused to trust even his own chief assistant with the facts.

Mr. Brent was really very nice to him.

He made matters as easy as was possible, once he learned the true bearings of the situation.

After complimenting Von Heidenfeldt on his courage in facing the unknown terrors of the room a second time, he rattled on, talking to cover Mr. Bohn's confusion:

"The next thing to do is to catch this miscreant, the baron. Curiosity will be his undoing. He will be consumed with anxiety to learn whether or not his device has been successful. How he must have scanned the papers to-day for the announcement of a terrible outrage at the Park Lane Hotel! By the next morning he will be unable to contain himself. The impulse to visit the locality, and see if there are any outward signs of an unusual occurrence having taken place, will be overpowering. You and I, Mr. Bohn, must watch the exterior of the hotel from an early hour. Depend upon it, we shall see the baron loitering among the passers-by."

They did see him—nay, more, the barrister caught him. The wretched man, shivering and protesting his innocence, although no charge was brought against him, was dragged by the scruff of the neck into the office.

There he was paraded before the count.

As soon as his eyes fell on his intended victim he regained a certain measure of self-control.

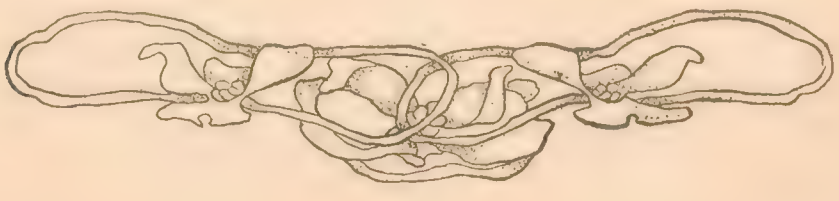
There was something heroic in the way the little rascal faced his implacable enemy and bade him do his worst.

The count laughed.

"So it is you, Fritz?" he guffawed. "I did not think you had the wit to plan such a scheme, nor the courage to carry it out. I was mistaken. But you see how powerless you are against me. Write to your precious confederates and tell them that all their struggles will not avail. If I fall, there are others who will crush them even more. Now, be off!"

Mr. Bohn protested feebly, but the count would not hear of a prosecution. Examination of the clock showed the devilish ingenuity of its wheels and springs. The barrister had guessed its nature precisely.

Von Heidenfeldt took it away with him when he went. The remainder of the "baron's" furniture became an asset of the hotel in lieu of our damaged wainscot.



BELOW THE DEAD LINE

By Scott Campbell

[NOTE.—When Inspector Byrnes commanded the New York Police Force he found it necessary to issue an order calling for the instant arrest of every crook found day or night in that part of the metropolis lying south of Fulton Street. This stringent order quickly gained for the district the title "Below the Dead Line," at least in police circles. As the lower part of the city contains Wall and Broad Streets and Maiden Lane, where the great diamond houses are located, various efforts were made by the "under world" to evade the order. For several years a number of crooks, headed by an unknown but extremely clever criminal, succeeded in operating in the district despite the police, and it is to chronicle their doings and their ultimate capture that Mr. Scott Campbell has written this interesting series of stories.—THE EDITOR.]

XX.—THE CASE OF THE TRAP-GUN

(*A Complete Story*)

"YOU get him! You get him and land him in limbo, sir, and you get the darby. Money's no object to me — no, siree, sir. You get him and the yaller boys is yourn. I'll blow ev'ry blasted shot in my locker to land the dod-gasted, lantern-jawed son of a galley cook. That's what I'll do, sir. I'd get him myself, so I would, if the bung-eyed toadfish hadn't peppered me so my ribs are as out and bare as those of a stranded wreck rotting on a lee shore. Money's no object—no, siree, sir. You get him, I say, and the darby's yourn."

The speaker's voice was strained and rasping. He sat propped up in bed, swathed in surgeon's bandages from his hips to his armpits. Most men as sorely wounded would have been utterly prostrated, if not already dead and laid out. But this old man had lived hard, and the indications were that he would die hard.

He was well over sixty, wrinkled, weather-beaten and grim, with a profusion of grizzled hair and unkempt whiskers. From under a pair of thick, bristling brows his glittering gray eyes gleamed forth as bright as those of a rat peering out of a bunch of oakum. They had lost none of their vengeful fire, his voice none of its rasping harshness, his spirit none of its vicious determination, despite the grievous wound that had laid him low, a hole in his side through which his life must gradually ebb away as surely as ebbs the flooded tide.

Gazing at the speaker's haggard face, Mr. Felix Boyd heard him without interrupting, yet his attentive eyes wore an expression of grave concern.

Obviously, too, his misgivings were shared by the two detectives, Akerman and Jimmie Coleman, both of the central office, who were mutely viewing the scene from an open doorway of the humble bedroom.

Even more marked was the anxiety of the one other observer, a robust girl of eighteen, standing motionless and silent in the glare of light through the single window. Her face was more striking than attractive, with a low forehead, heavy brows, a pair of intensely dark eyes and a firm chin and mouth. She was but plainly clad, her loose

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blouse waist showing most of her robust neck, then throbbing under emotions governed by a vigorous will, while she stared with sinister coldness at the several intruders under her father's roof.

Not one among them doubted that the old man could not live out the day, yet Felix Boyd, who had just arrived upon the scene under circumstances presently to appear, replied in a way to offer a word of cheer.

"Ease off a little, cap'n," said he, in kindly fashion. "You're taking long chances in speaking so vehemently."

"Damme, sir, so I allus did!"

"Better not exert yourself too much. I shall hear you if you speak easily."

"Easy be hanged," was the reply, with an irate snarl and growl. "I speak as I feel, as I allus did and allus will, as long as I speak at all."

"But that may not be over long, Captain Cook, unless you husband your strength," said Boyd, gently. "You are badly knocked out."

The old man's fiery stare wavered slightly at this hint at his desperate condition, and for a moment his eyes dwelt sharply on an opposite wall of the room. Then they sought those of Felix Boyd again, who had caught their curious glint, and the doughty seaman broke forth with unabated asperity, shaking his grizzled head from side to side like a rocking stone.

"Avast, you, sir! I'm not scuttled to the sinking p'int, not by a jugful. Death can't foot fast enough to overhaul me on this 'ere reach. No, siree, sir! I'm not down for planting. Nuther could I be easy while the cursed skate that gave me this dose o' lead is out of irons. You get him, sir, and the darby's yourn. Damn him for a foul-faced sculpin! I couldn't croak if I tried afore he's triced up in a hemp necktie. No, siree, sir, don't you think it."

Boyd smiled faintly and arose from his seat on the edge of the bed.

"I will talk with you presently, skipper, and see what I can make of the case," said he. "Look out this way, Jimmie."

With a toss of his head he intimated that he wished to see the two detectives alone, and he led them through an adjoining entry and out of doors, the bedroom being on the ground floor of the dwelling.

It was a small wooden house, standing alone on the edge of a narrow belt of woods and within a cable's length of the open sea. No other habitation was in sight, yet a rough shore road a few rods in front of the house bore signs of considerable travel, indicating that the isolated dwelling was by no means in a wilderness. It occupied, in fact, one of the unsettled shore districts well out of New York City, yet not so far removed but that Detective Ackerman had been sent down there posthaste from the central office to investigate the crime reported by wire that morning.

It was some after noon, however, when Felix Boyd arrived upon the scene. He had come down in response to a telegram from Coleman, and, after a brief talk with the wounded man, a part of which has been recorded, he now halted on a patch of greensward fronting the house, and turned to his companions.

"Who is this seaman, Cook?" he asked, curiously. "And what about him and this case, Jimmie, that you wired me down here?"

"I'll answer the last question first, Felix," smiled Coleman. "After sizing up the case this morning, Akerman found there were features of it he could not fathom, and he thought there might be obscure bits of evidence which a better man than himself might discern. So he wired up asking me to bring you down here, if you would come. I thought I had better slip down here first, however, and have a look for myself. Having had it, Felix, I came to the same conclusion as Akerman."

"That a better man was needed?" smiled Boyd, oddly.

"Precisely."

"Humph!" grunted Boyd, dryly. "You are complimentary, Jimmie."

"Besides," added Coleman, laughing, "since your late adversary, the Big Finger, still is lying low, you will be getting rusty unless provided with some-

thing to employ your wits. So help us out in this affair, like a good fellow."

It was, indeed, some months since Boyd had effected the arrest and conviction of Mr. Magnus Scanlon, the notorious Big Finger, whose criminal work below the dead line long was a menace to the great financial interests served by the former. With a death sentence hanging over him, however, Scanlon had, as previously related, cleverly contrived to escape from custody, and he since had been keeping well under cover. Yet Boyd did not doubt that this arch criminal sooner or later would resume his felonious work, and he had not relaxed his watch for the knave since the day of his extraordinary escape.

Thus it happened that the case then brought to Boyd's notice occurred during a breathing period, so to speak, and while it lies outside of his ordinary work below Nassau Street, it so strikingly exemplifies his rare art and peculiar methods that it cannot well be omitted from a record of his professional exploits.

He laughed lightly at Coleman's remarks, then said, curtly, with a subtle gleam of quickened interest in his keen gray eyes:

"I'll do what I can for you, Jimmie. Now, who is this man Cook? And what about this case, Akerman, that puzzles you two fellows?"

"You tell him, Jimmie."

"It can be told in a nutshell, Felix," said Coleman. "Cook lives here with his daughter, the girl you saw in yonder. He used to be master of a whaler, we're told, but he came here about four years ago with a deed of the property he now holds, on which he built this house and quit going to sea."

"Where did he come from?"

"New Bedford way, it's said."

"Not much known about him, eh?"

"We can learn but very little."

"Go on, Jimmie."

"That he's an ugly dog, Felix, you've already seen," continued Coleman, with a grimace. "While the people about here are of the poorer class, boatmen, day laborers and the like, they are peaceably inclined, yet Cook has invited the hearty hatred and enmity of one and all. Not one says a good word for him. All describe him as a quarrelsome, half-drunken ruffian, apparently bent upon keeping everybody at a long distance, or upon making trouble for any who intrude upon him. In so doing he has made no end of enemies about here, and appears to have been in constant fear of assault, if not assassination."

"Humph!" grunted Boyd. "He doesn't talk much like a timid man."

"Possibly he displays more sand, Felix, now that the blow has been struck," rejoined Coleman. "At all events, his apprehensions evidently led him to guard himself with every precaution. Note the wooden shutters at his windows. In addition to the ordinary locks and bolts, he has heavy iron bars for securing both his front and back doors. In the rear yard, close under the high fence, I found a huge bear trap, probably set at night to catch any intruder from that direction."

"Obviously," smiled Boyd, oddly, "he meant business."

"I should say so," nodded Coleman. "Added to all this, he lately has kept his daughter constantly in the house with him, nor has he ventured out at night unless accompanied by her. She states, however, that she knows of no cause for her father's apprehension, other than that mentioned by him."

"His fear of enemies he may have made about here?" queried Boyd.

"Exactly."

"How does the girl impress you, Jimmie?"

"She appears perfectly honest," said Coleman. "Yet she evidently has a streak of the old man in her, for she's as stiff and cold as a stone. That may result in part, however, from her resentment of the suspicion now cast upon a young chap named Garrett, who is said to be in love with her and she with him, much to the irate opposition of the old man. He and Garrett have had no end of word fights, and Cook has repeatedly threatened to shoot Garrett if seen within fifty yards of this house."

"Why is Garrett now suspected of this crime?"

"The shooting occurred late yesterday afternoon," Coleman went on to explain. "It seems that Cook went away on business two or three days ago, and his daughter went to stay with a girl friend half a mile above here until her father returned. Cook arrived home alone yesterday afternoon, and he states that, just as he was entering his front door, he was shot from around the corner of his house."

"Some one lying in wait for him, eh?"

"So it appears," nodded Coleman. "The miscreant used a gun loaded with duck shot, and Cook received most of the charge in his left side. He pitched forward into the entry, where he lay unconscious until nearly dusk, when he was found by Joan, his daughter, and the girl mentioned, who had walked home with her."

"Bad enough, for a fact," muttered Boyd.

"There are indications," added Coleman, "that the house was searched by the would-be assassin after the shooting, while Cook was unconscious, yet it cannot be found that anything of value was stolen. As regards Garrett, the girl's lover, he was seen about here with a gun yesterday afternoon, and he has been placed under arrest."

"What does he say for himself?"

"He denies any knowledge of the crime. He says he was out gunning for shore birds yesterday, and that he came up to the woodland back here hoping to see Joan, not knowing that both she and her father were absent. He claims to have seen nobody hanging about this house, however, and that's about all we can get from him."

"Isn't that enough, you sirs? If more you want, take my word for it —Neil Garrett never shot my dad. It's his daughter, too, who says it."

The three men started involuntarily, turning to look at the speaker.

Framed in the open doorway of the house stood Joan Cook, till then a mute and unobserved listener to their interview. She stood leaning against the casing, with her strong girlish figure thrown into striking relief, with her dark brows closely knit and her eyes fixed with sinister steadfastness upon her hearers. Yet her voice had sounded as inflexible and cold as she for the most part appeared.

Rightly assuming that Coleman had imparted about all that he had learned of the crime, Boyd was more pleased than disconcerted by the girl's unexpected intrusion, for he now wished to question her apart from her father. Drawing a little nearer to her, he gravely rejoined:

"Do you feel very sure of that, my girl?"

Without the slightest change of countenance, she raised her fine arm and pointed toward the bedroom.

"Ay, I do," she said, with moody gravity. "Would a girl whose dad lies yonder as he lies say other than she felt? Ay, sir, I do. It is his daughter who says it."

"But perhaps your opinion is influenced by your affection for young Mr. Garrett," said Boyd, in a considerate way. "How about that, Miss Cook?"

"Not so," she slowly replied. "I'm like him in yonder, sir; I speak as I feel. Garrett's a man, for all you sirs may try to run him down. I feel he's a man—and only a cur could have done that! Only a cur, sir!"

"Right, gal. Only a blear-eyed, mangy mongrel. Only a dirty, scurvy, lop-eared cross atween a slimy dogfish and a—a—a——"

The last came from the man in the bedroom, who plainly had been listening with all his ears, and it terminated in a fit of coughing and choking that cut short the string of opprobrious epithets the whilom seaman would have bestowed upon his assailant, out of a vocabulary that appeared utterly inexhaustible.

Yet Joan made no move to return to him, and Boyd beckoned her to come out from the doorway and join him.

"I am inclined to think you are right, my girl," said he, dropping his voice a trifle. "Be assured, at all events, that

Garrett shall suffer no wrong at our hands."

For the first time the girl's expressive dark eyes lost their sinister glow and lighted for the better. For a moment she gazed mutely at Boyd's frank face, then swallowed with difficulty, as if her throat pained her, and then she said, simply:

"Thankee, sir."

Here Boyd caught sight of a gathering of men and boys in the road, staring with curious gaze toward the scene of the crime, and several evinced an inclination to approach. Possibly Joan's slight betrayal of feeling led to his abrupt change of manner, or, perhaps, he really meant what he said. At all events, he exclaimed, curtly, with eyes beginning to glow:

"Drive those people away, Akerman. I'm about to start in on this case, and I want no inquisitive observers. Away with them, one and all! See to it, Akerman."

Both detectives hastened to comply, and Coleman softly muttered, as they strode toward the rough shore road:

"He's away with a rush, Dan! I see it in his face."

Felix Boyd had turned again to the waiting girl.

II.

In the face of Felix Boyd the central office man had seen only the suddenly dilating eyes, the knitting brows, the expanding nostrils, the closer-drawn lips—signs which Coleman long since had learned to read aright, and which were seen only when Boyd's rare detective instinct came sharply into play, as when a hound is abruptly loosed from leash. Yet his voice softened slightly when he addressed Joan Cook.

"I shall try to be your friend, my girl," said he, quickly. "Answer me. What time did you reach home last night?"

The girl hesitated for an instant only, then said:

"Nigh dusk. Say seven o'clock."

"And your father?"

"He says about five."

"Two hours—was he conscious when you came?"

"Only partly."

"He had been away since when?"

"Since Monday morning, sir. Two days."

"Has he been in the habit of thus going away?"

"No, sir. Never before since we came to live here."

"Came from where?"

"Near New Bedford, sir."

"He was a whaler?"

"Yes, for others."

"You mean he commanded a vessel for others?"

"Yes."

"Did you come to live here soon after his last voyage?"

"Right after it, sir."

"What do you mean by right—a day, a week, a month?"

Again the girl's heavy brows were drooping slightly.

"Only a day or two, not more," she moodily answered.

"Two hours—stay! Show me where you found him lying," said Boyd, who had been pressing his inquiries upon the girl with a rapidity that left her no moment for consideration.

She walked to the open door and pointed into the entry.

"I found him lying there."

"Show me just where."

"Just where I am pointing."

"Two hours—then he should have been seen from the road—stop a bit! Will this door close of itself? No, no, its tendency is to swing open. He had pitched forward into the entry? You found him lying exactly here?"

"Yes, as I twice have said."

"Then he should have been seen from the road. Two hours—is it often that two hours pass in which no persons go by this house?"

"No, sir. Very rarely."

"Did you find the door open or closed?"

"I found it closed."

While speaking, Boyd had stepped lightly into the entry and examined the front door. When partly open, its tendency was to swing wide open, toward

the inner wall. Still visible on the floor were indications of the dark pool of blood which had flowed from the wounded man, corroborating the statement of his daughter. Plainly he had fallen so far into the entry that his body would not have interfered with the swinging of the door. Naturally it should have swung open, and Boyd quickly reasoned that the body would have been seen from the road if left two hours in the open entry. Some person then, possibly the assailant, must have closed the door after the shooting.

Dropping to his knee on the threshold, Boyd next examined the casing on the right. Imbedded here and there in the wood were several bits of lead, part of the charge of shot fired at Cook when he entered. At first sight they appeared to have come from the direction he had stated, as if his assailant had fired at him from around the opposite corner of the house.

Suddenly, however, Boyd sprang to his feet and glanced sharply through the hall and at a sitting room to the left. The hall ran directly through the house to a back door. On the right of it was the bedroom, in which the seaman was lying. The sitting room, however, joined the front hall, with no door between the two, the stairs being directly opposite the front door and adjoining the side wall of the sitting room.

Constantly watching him from under her low brows, the girl near by had seen Boyd's eyes light sharply, and a look of quickened curiosity appeared in her own. Boyd at once observed it, and said, shortly:

"Go to your father, my girl. I presently will come and question him."

That he had impressed her favorably was obvious, for she obeyed him without a word. Then Boyd glanced again through the narrow entry. High in one of the panels of the back door, some twenty feet away, he had discovered a small bright spot, the more noticeable because of the semidarkness at that end of the entry.

"A hole through the door," he muttered, under his breath. "Such holes seldom are made by accident. I'll inspect it closer."

He stepped out of the front door and glanced toward the road. Both men from the central office were standing like sentinels some fifty yards away, guarding against the approach of any strangers. Boyd smiled faintly as he stole around the house.

"Good men, both of them, but too superficial for work as delicate as this," he murmured. "A hole in the back door, eh? That should have some significance."

As he rounded the corner of the house, he examined the ground where Cook's assailant was said to have been standing when he fired the shot. Yet in the dry sand and gravel there were no signs of footprints, nor any indications that a man had been lying in wait there.

At the rear of the house two wooden steps led up to the back door. Standing on the upper one, Boyd carefully examined the hole in the panel. He was obliged to stand on tiptoe to examine it closely, despite that he was a tall man.

"It was made by driving a wire nail through the wood and then withdrawing it," he muttered, with increasing interest. "Here are the marks left by the head of the hammer. Evidently designed for a peephole, and it enables one to peer through and see the front door. Newly made, too. But the motive—that's the question!"

Boyd lingered there only a moment, devoting it to a searching glance on all sides for some sign of a box, a block of wood, or a suitable stone, on which a man shorter than himself might have stood in order to peer through the hole.

"There's not so much as a bit of board about here," he grimly muttered. "Here's one point nailed, with no reasonable room for doubts, and it may lead to others."

Returning to the front door, he quietly entered, taking care that his movements should not be heard by Cook and his daughter. His discovery at the back door now led him to examine the

front one. About an inch from an upper corner on the inside he quickly detected a faint discoloration, as of oil or grease, and in the middle of the stain was a tiny round spot. Mounting to a chair, Boyd studied it closer.

It was another tiny hole. This one, however, had been filled with putty, the oil from which had caused the slight surrounding discoloration. Finding it fresh and soft, Boyd dug out a portion of the putty with the point of a toothpick, then examined the tiny hole.

"By Jove!" he mentally exclaimed. "This was made with a small screw eye. Hello! yonder is another! Was this crime as treacherous and cowardly as these indicate? By Heaven, it looks as if I was right!"

His face had grown hard and severe. Glancing at the entry wall, he had detected, within an inch of the ceiling, a second oily spot, as if a soiled thumb or finger had filled a hole with putty, then wiped away the loose filling. Two feet beyond was a third, while on the front wall of the adjoining sitting room, in a direct line with the others, were a fourth and fifth.

Boyd glanced about the room. The walls were sheathed, instead of plastered, with a molding running around them level with the lower casing of the windows. In the top of the molding on the front wall Boyd discovered two more of the puttied holes.

In other respects the room was only ordinary, with a cheap picture here and there on the walls, a few ornaments on the wooden mantel and a parlor stove in one corner. Yet the general cleanliness and orderly appearance, the neatly adjusted antimacassars on several of the chairs, spoke well for the seaman's daughter.

Through an open door leading into the kitchen, Boyd next noticed a double-barreled fowling piece in two brackets attached to the wall. He took it down and ran his little finger into the muzzle of each barrel. It was fairly clean when he drew it from the first. He drew it soiled and black from the other, however.

"Humph! I guess there's but little doubt about all this," he grimly soliloquized. "One barrel has been recently fired. Here is the empty shell still in the breach. By Jove! the whole job has a nasty look! How to get at the guilty miscreant—that's now the question!"

He replaced the gun in the brackets, then tiptoed back into the front entry. From the bedroom there sounded only the labored breathing of the wounded man. In the warm sunlight of the shore road fifty yards away the two men from the central office stood earnestly talking, with glances now and then directed toward the house. Both wondered, seeing nothing of Felix Boyd, how he was engaged and what on earth he could discover so obscure as to have escaped their experienced observation. Knowing him as they did, however, their confidence in him never wavered.

Boyd's features had softened slightly, indicating that his mental tension had relaxed. He walked quietly to the bedroom door and entered.

Joan had drawn the shade at the window and was seated near the head of the bed. Seen in the subdued light of the room, Cook's bloodless face appeared doubly ghastly, as if the hue of death already had settled upon it. That his strength was steadily waning, that the inevitable end could not be very far away, was painfully obvious. Yet he started up a little the moment Boyd entered, and a vengeful fire again revived in his sunken eyes.

"Can you get him?" he hoarsely demanded, with a desperate effort. "D'ye think you can get him, the crab-toed, barnacle-skinned——"

"Ease off, cap'n," Boyd gently interposed, taking a chair beside the bed. "Ease off, I say, or you'll be going by the board neck and heels when you least think it. Steady a bit, old man, and answer a few questions for me. I shall try to discover and arrest the man who shot you, never doubt that."

At this second hint at death, a gleam of angry distrust again shot out from under the seaman's beetling brows, and for a moment he seemed inclined to resent it. Then, as before, his eyes

gradually shrank from Boyd's steadfast gaze, and then drifted apprehensively toward the opposite wall of the room. Boyd saw, and mentally noted the change, as he had done before, yet did not ask any explanation.

He inquired, however, before Cook could reply:

"Did you get any glimpse at the man, cap'n, as you fell, or just before he fired?"

A mingled snarl and sneer sounded through the seaman's matted beard.

"If I had," he demanded, scornfully, "d'ye think I'd have stood to be shot like a peep on a beach?"

Boyd laughed lightly and shook his head.

"Not likely, cap'n, I'll admit," said he, pleasantly. "Then you have no idea who the miscreant was?"

"Only that he was an oily-livered hound, a scurvy, black-faced——"

"Easy, old man! Possibly he was some rascal living in this neighborhood?"

"Mebbe so—what's it to me where he lives, so be it you can get him? Ay, sir, it looks that way," was added, with a subdued growl.

"Do you know of any enemy you have made in the past, cap'n, who might thus have tried to kill you?"

"Not I! Why d'ye ask me that 'ere question?"

"Only to get at the truth, if possible."

"I dunno more'n I've told."

"No, no, cap'n, surely not," protested Boyd, assuasively. "Nobody imagines that you do. You've been away the past two days, I am told."

"Ay, I have."

"To New Bedford, I take it?"

"Eh? Why the devil d'ye say that?" cried Cook, in a quick, harsh whisper.

"Only because I was told you came from that city, and I thought that business interests, perhaps, had occasioned a return visit," explained Boyd, agreeably.

The seaman sank back upon his pillow, from which, despite his wound, he had started up with a half-smothered growl and groan.

"Ay, that's right," he huskily admitted, with countenance changing. "I was down that way. I thought mebbe I could get a share or two in some vessel, one o' the whalers, but 'tain't to be had for the price I——"

"Oh, it doesn't matter, cap'n, not in the least," Boyd quietly interposed. "Don't exhaust your strength in explaining. I reckon, too, that I weary you with so many fruitless questions. I've had a look about here, sir, and I shall do my best to discover and arrest your assailant. I cannot promise very much as yet, however, for there seems to be no very definite clew to the rascal."

For the first time since his arrival at the house, Boyd now observed that Cook smiled faintly—a grim, ghastly smile, to be sure, but still a smile.

"That seems to please you, cap'n," laughed Boyd, rising.

The seaman started slightly, then frowned more darkly than ever, and fiercely growled:

"'Tain't that—not what you think! Damme, sir, I'm only smiling to think you landlubbers come nosing around here all for nothing. I say what I said afore, mind you that! Get him, if you can! Land him in limbo, the mangy cur, and I'll give the last shot in my locker! The low-lived——"

"Steady once more, cap'n!" Boyd again interposed. "You'd best husband your strength, old man. I will do the best that I can with the case, Captain Cook, and soon will see you again."

Then he abruptly turned and left the room, not observing that Joan followed him. At the front door, however, she laid her hand on his arm and stopped him.

"You're going," she timidly said, with her moody dark eyes fixed on his. "Tell me you don't think—you don't think——"

Boyd kindly helped her out by saying, when she choked and faltered:

"That your friend Garrett is guilty of—by the way, I know a chap about here named Garrett. Possibly it's the same man. My friend Garrett is a long, lanky, rawboned——"

Joan quickly shook her head.

"Not the same," she tersely said, with a look of disappointment. "Neil Garrett is short and fat, a young man who——"

"Ah, well, as to that other matter," Boyd oddly interrupted, dropping his voice nearly to a whisper, "think no more about that, my girl. Take my word for it, the word of one who knows—your friend Garrett has told the truth and is entirely innocent of this brutal crime!"

A wave of red rose over the girl's dark cheeks and her eyes lighted marvelously. Before she could frame the grateful reply she would have tried to make, however, Boyd had slipped out of the front door and departed. As he approached the road Coleman came hastening to meet him.

"Well, what do you make of it, Felix?" he demanded, with much eagerness.

"Cook knows," said Boyd, dryly.

"Knows what?"

"Who shot him."

"The devil you say!" cried the central office man, struck with amazement.

"But Cook won't tell," laughed Felix Boyd, oddly.

"Won't tell?"

"He'll last the week out, however, in case it becomes necessary to drive him to the wall, poor devil. He's as tough as a knot, and will last a while longer. Before the week's end, Jimmie, I hope to have—ah, well, we shall see! We shall see!"

III.

For two days following the episodes depicted the subjoined advertisement appeared in display type in all of the New York daily newspapers, materially increasing Felix Boyd's daily mail, and bringing to his Pine Street office during the hour mentioned almost an endless string of men, ranging all the way from five foot six to six foot five.

WANTED—An assistant paperhanger. Must be a tall man, for work in high rooms and on stagings. Experience not necessary. Long contract job in Mexico, with good pay, for the right man. Address, or call between eleven and twelve o'clock, F. Boyd, No. —— Pine Street.

For two days during the hour limit Boyd sat at his desk and complacently received the responding army of unemployed, measuring each man in turn, asking a question or two of this one or that one, and turning them away with excuses and a graciousness that served in part to allay the disappointment born of blighted hopes.

For two days during the same limited period, Akerman and Jimmie Coleman sat quietly in Boyd's adjoining room, with the door barely ajar, listening with all their ears, and wondering at times if they were not victims of a huge practical joke or performers in some colossal farce.

About noon of the second day, however, as his predecessor was about departing, a man entered whose appearance immediately aroused in Boyd a much more lively interest.

He was tall and narrow, like a lath, above six feet in his stockings, with sloping shoulders, long arms and hands, a depressed chest, a neck like that of a picked bird, on which was awkwardly poised a small head nearly as round as a bullet. Though not over fifty years old, he was wrinkled and weazened, with skin as worn and weather-beaten as the sun and winds of the sea could make it. His lurching gait, the moment he came over the threshold, told Boyd that the stranger was a seaman.

"Turn the key, my man," he said, carelessly. "I don't want more than one of you fellows in here at once. I presume you call in response to my advertisement."

The man removed his woolen cap, then settled his printed gingham shirt—he wore no collar—lower about his thin, protruding neck.

"Be you Mr. Boyd?" he asked, with a doubtful stare and a voice as piping as a bo'sun's whistle.

"Yes," said Boyd, nodding. "Take a chair while you remain."

The man's long, lanky legs doubled like a jackknife when he sat down, and

then he fished from his vest pocket a scrap of crumpled newspaper containing Boyd's advertisement.

"If this 'ere's yourn——" he began.

"Yes, that is my ad., all right," interposed Boyd. "And I'm sorry, too, that I ever inserted it. I've had half a thousand loafers here in the past two days, and not a mother's son of them would take the job I offered him. Talk about men's wanting work; there's nothing in it. It's money without work that most of them want. I can't get one to go to Mexico with me and agree to remain there a year."

A grin, indescribably crafty, had gradually risen over his hearer's rather repulsive face.

"Thet so?" said he, shrilly. "Waal, sir, I'm not thet cut of a man."

"You'd be willing to go?"

"Ay, I would."

"And remain there a year with me?"

"Ay, or longer."

"Can you stand a hot climate?"

"Stand it, eh?" and the man laughed audibly. "I reckon so. 'Tain't half as hot in Mexico as 'tis in one place I've heerd tell of."

Boyd joined in the fellow's insinuating laugh, displaying a satisfaction well calculated to please him and place him at his ease. At the same time, however, he fell to absently tapping on the top of his desk with his pencil.

The two men in the adjoining room instantly pricked up their ears.

"Have you ever done any paper hanging?" inquired Boyd.

"Nope," and the small head on the long neck wagged with the negative. "But this 'ere says——"

"That experience is not necessary," put in Boyd, affably. "That's quite right, my man. I have enough of experienced hands, but I want a couple of helpers. There's sixty dollars a month in it, including board and lodging. How would that hit you?"

"Right atween wind and water," grinned the man, readily.

"You'd be willing to get away this week?"

"I'm ready now, sir; say the word."

"Good enough," laughed Boyd. "I shall wish you to remain there with me, however, if you go."

"I'll do thet, all right. The longer the better."

"You're the first man I've struck who talked business," declared Boyd, in tones of hearty approval. "Not got any family to be bothering over your long absence, have you?"

"Nope," the man tersely rejoined, with another leer. "Nobody'll bother me, once I'm well away. The longer the cruise, sir, the better I'll like it."

"You speak like a man who has followed the sea," smiled Boyd.

"Ay, summut."

"Then you could work handily on a staging without losing your head."

"I reckon so. If I lose my head 'cause I'm high up, it'll be the fust time."

"What's your name, my man?"

"Thad Targon, sir. Short fur Thadeus. A fine name to give a man, wasn't it?"

Boyd joined in the shrill, derisive laugh with which the last was said, and saw that, despite his own earlier caution, Targon was without the least suspicion of having been drawn into a net.

"Are you lodging here in town, Mr. Targon?" he inquired, lightly.

"Jest now I be," nodded Targon.

"You may leave your address before you go," smiled Boyd. "We shall get away by Saturday. Have you ever done any carpenter's work, Mr. Targon?"

"Waal, summut," Targon demurred. "Not over much."

"I thought you possibly had been a ship's carpenter," explained Boyd, pleasantly. "But that doesn't matter. You'll be mostly required to work on a staging, at the walls of quite high rooms, to assist in laying the paper smoothly."

"I can do thet all right."

"That's why I advertised for a tall man," added Boyd, rising from his chair and drawing nearer the door of his side room. "The chambers of which I have had plans sent me are twelve feet from floor to ceiling. You must stand good six feet, Mr. Targon."

"Six feet four," grinned Targon, ris-

ing and drawing up his attenuated frame.

"Got a pretty long reach?" queried Boyd, thrusting his thumb and finger into his fob pocket.

"Ruther! See fur yourself, and——"

"Here!" said Boyd, abruptly. "Take this, Mr. Targon, and see if you can fix it one inch from the top right-hand corner of that door without the help of a chair."

And Felix Boyd quickly placed in the palm of the unsuspecting man—a small metal screw eye.

Then he fell quickly back to the door leading into the corridor, and his right hand went to his hip pocket.

Targon hung fire scarce an instant after beholding the screw eye. His lank figure buckled like a racer's boom in a whirlwind. A snarl like that of a wolf suddenly trapped broke from him. Half crouching, with eyes ablaze and lips drawn tight over his yellow teeth, he cried with a voice subdued by its strained ferocity:

"Why d'ye gimme this? Why? Why?"

"Because," cried Boyd, sternly, "that's one of the screw eyes you dropped on the floor of Cook's house last Wednesday afternoon——"

"You lie! I didn't drop one! They weren't this size!" Targon fiercely interrupted, with a mingling of rage and apprehension that blinded him to the incriminating significance of his own words.

"Yet you are wanted, Mr. Targon."

"Fur what? Fur what?"

"For the shooting of Captain Zachary Cook."

"Get away from thet door!"

The entire scene was enacted in a tithe of the time taken to describe it. With utter desperation pictured in every feature, with every nerve quivering, Targon bounded forward as if to sweep Boyd from his path.

He was met by the muzzle of Boyd's revolver, however, while the latter's cry of warning rang like a trumpet through the room.

"You're a dead man if you try it!"

Targon recoiled as if struck in the face. Then his eyes fell upon the other door, and he made the very move Boyd expected. With a half-choked oath he leaped backward, then darted into the side room—and into the waiting arms of the two men from the central office.

For thirty seconds the sounds that issued from the inner room might well have been those of a caged wild cat in a menagerie fire. Boyd smiled grimly, however, and left the work of subjection to the two detectives. He slipped his revolver back into his pocket and resumed the seat at his desk.

Presently the sounds ceased for the most part, and then appeared the two detectives with their man in irons. He was not, however, entirely in all of his possessions, for his coat and shirt had been fairly ripped to ribbons in his mad efforts to escape.

"By thunder!" panted Coleman, with a grimace, "he's an infernal Tartar, for all he's built like a pair of scissors."

"What's that knocking?" cried Boyd, sharply. "See who's at the door."

Akerman ran and opened the office door.

A lad with a telegram entered, and Boyd quickly tore open the message and read it.

"Humph!" he ejaculated, with a glance at Coleman. "Cook died at ten o'clock this morning."

"Oh, it has all come out in the wash, Jimmie, just as I anticipated. To save his neck, Targon has accepted a life sentence and made a clean breast of the whole business. It's as plain as the nose on an elephant's face."

"I've read of a blind man who once mistook an elephant's trunk for a snake," growled the central office man, laughing. "It may be plain to you, Felix, but I'm blessed if you've made it plain to me."

Boyd smiled through a wreath of pipe smoke, and elevated his heels to his office desk. This was more than a week subsequent to the arrest of Targon and the death of Captain Cook.

"I'll make it plain, Jimmie, with a

very few words," said he. "Targon was Cook's mate during the latter's last voyage to the south seas something like four years ago. On their homeward run, while touching at a South American port for water, the two ran foul of a New York man who was dying in a local hotel, and who intrusted to them considerable money and a deed of the piece of land on which Cook subsequently built his house."

"Humph! The two miserable dogs stole the stuff, eh?"

"Precisely," nodded Boyd. "Cook had charge of it, however, and upon reaching port he gave Targon the slip, instead of dividing the plunder, and after Targon had embarked upon another three-year cruise, Cook came and built on the land of which, in another's name, he held the stolen deed. This deed, so it happened, never had been recorded, and Cook was feeling sure that his confederate never would locate him, not having been much informed about the stranger they had jointly wronged."

"I see," nodded Coleman.

"Last week," continued Boyd, "Targon's vessel returned to New Bedford, and he got wind of Cook's whereabouts and at once started out on the warpath. Cook had seen the whaler's arrival, however, and he sneaked away to New Bedford to learn what Targon might attempt to undertake. He failed to find him, so returned home. These are the facts that led up to the shooting."

"But what about that?" inquired Coleman. "And how did you ferret out the true situation, causing you to plan that move for trapping Targon?"

Boyd laughed lightly, pressing the tobacco deeper into the bowl of his pipe.

"I'll tell you how, Jimmie," said he. "Cook's habits and precautions at his house plainly showed that he stood in continual fear of some person. The fact that but little was known of him about here, however, made it safe to assume that he was guarding himself against some person with whom he had had previous relations."

"Naturally, Felix."

"His added caution of late further indicated that his fears had increased, for some reason, and I began to suspect, the interval since his settlement here being about the length of a whaler's cruise, that the man he feared was a former shipmate. I was convinced of it, moreover, upon learning that he had been away from home but once, and then to New Bedford."

"I follow you," bowed Coleman.

"While I saw that he thought he was telling the truth about it, his story of the shooting did not quite suit me, Jimmie," Boyd went on. "And when I discovered the peephole in the back door, and learned that a search of the house had been made, I decided that the assailant was as much afraid of Cook as Cook was of him."

"A case of dog eat dog, eh?"

"Exactly, Jimmie. My opinion was clinched, moreover, by the discovery of the screw-eye holes and the gun in the kitchen. The scheme adopted by the assailant at once occurred to me."

"Namely?"

"It was like this," continued Boyd. "Not finding Cook at home, Targon got into the house to search for the stolen deed, so as to have some tangible hold on Cook. He did not find it, but he discovered Cook's gun in the kitchen. Being mortally afraid to meet Cook in a physical encounter, the rascal then rigged a trap by which to shoot him when he entered, without danger to himself, and in the hope of finding the deed in Cook's pocket after the shooting. He made the peephole in the back door, by the way, that he might see how the shooting terminated without being seen himself."

"What was the trap he rigged?" inquired the central office man, curiously.

"He fixed Cook's gun to the wall molding in such a way that it would cover any person entering the front door," explained Boyd. "Guided by the screw eyes, which he went out and bought, he rigged a line from the top of the closed door, along and down the wall to the trigger of the gun. When ready for business the gun's hammer was raised and the line fastened to the trigger. Then the opening of the front door some ten inches drew the line taut,

and another inch brought down the hammer and discharged the gun, just as the person who opened the door was crossing the threshold. Under these conditions it was quite natural that Cook should have thought he was shot by some person near the corner of the house."

"True," nodded Coleman. "By Jove! that was a murderous contrivance."

"Decidedly, Jimmie," admitted Boyd. "The measurements were made to a nicety, and Cook received the charge of shot in his left side. Peering through the peephole, Targon saw him lying senseless in the entry, and he hastened to search his pockets for the deed. Then failing to find it, and becoming alarmed over what he had done, he destroyed the evidence as best he could, closed the front door and fled."

"Yes, yes, it's plain enough thus far," said Coleman. "But why didn't Cook out with the truth and reveal the probable identity of his assailant? He appeared anxious enough to have him caught."

"Appearances are deceitful," laughed Boyd. "As a matter of fact, Jimmie, Cook's attitude was all a bluff. He believed he would recover from his wound, in which case he did not want Targon caught, which necessarily would result in his own exposure. He took on as he did only to divert suspicion from any of his past knaveries, and with a view to handling Targon in his own way when he got well."

"Oh, ho, I see!"

"I knew that Targon would not venture returning to his vessel, with any possibility of suspicion pointing to him, but that he more likely would hang about New York till he could ship away or get a chance to slip out of the country. So I inserted that advertisement, Jimmie, and we—ah, well, you have seen the result."

"Rather!" exclaimed the central office man, significantly. "But what of that girl, Felix, and the missing deed?"

"Oh! I have located the latter," laughed Boyd.

"You have?"

"Easily."

"How so?"

"Each time Cook heard me speak of the possibility of his sudden death," explained Boyd, "I saw him glance doubtfully at one of the walls of his bedroom. I suspected he might have something concealed there. I have been out there since he died, Jimmie, and found a secret cupboard in the sheathing."

"And in the cupboard, Felix?"

"Was the deed of the land and a considerable part of the securities and money stolen from the man in South America? There's one feature more curious than all the rest, Jimmie."

"What's that?" demanded Coleman.

"The man wronged by these two dogs was none other than the father of young Garrett, with whom the seaman's daughter is in love. It's a bit mixed up, the property part of it, but Garrett will get what's coming to him, all right—and he'll get the girl as well. They're both in a way, now, to see a brighter and sweeter side of life."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" exclaimed Coleman, inelegantly. "All this beats me, Felix, for a fact."

"So you see, Jimmie," and Boyd smiled and nodded and laid aside his pipe, "that God works in strange, mysterious ways His wonders to perform. Will you come out and fire a ball, Jimmie?"

(The next story in this series will be "The Case of the Crooked Artist.")

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31432. "Friends That Are Good and True" (from "Rollicking Girl") . . . . Eysler

Soprano Solo by Miss Ada Jones.
4430. "My Carolina Lady"

Duet by Miss Morgan and Mr. Stanley.
4428. "When You and I Were Young, Maggie" . . Butterfield

Duet by Stanley and Harlan.
4429. "Soldier Boy" . . . . Hoffman

Comic Songs by Arthur Collins.
4431. "The Preacher and the Bear" . . . . . Arzonia
4432. "Rufus Rastus Johnson Brown" . . . . . Von Tilzer
31433. "Any Rags!" . . . . . Allen

Duet by Macdonough and Bieling.
4433. "I Need Thee Every Hour" Lowry

Billy Murray and Haydn Quartet.
4434. "It's Allus de Same in Dixie" . . . . . Cook

Harry Macdonough and Haydn Quartet.
4435. "Good Bye, Sweet Marie" . Mills

Duet by Collins and Harlan.
31434. "Making Eyes" . . . Von Tilzer

Musical Specialty by Spencer and Hunter.
4436. "The Barn Dance in Dixie" . . . . . Spencer

Rube Specialty by Stanley and Harlan.
4437. "Two Rubes and the Tramp Fiddler" . . . . . Stanley

German Specialty by Miss Jones and Mr. Spencer.
4438. "Louis and Lena" . . .

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81078. "Habanera" Carmen . . Bizet
81079. "Les filles de Cadiz" . . Delibes
85083. "O Rest in the Lord"—Elijah . . . Mendelssohn
85084. "Les filles de Cadiz" Delibes
85085. "Ah! mon fils, sois beni!" Le Prophete . Meyerbeer

Sig. Giuseppe Campanari, Baritone (with orchestra).
81074. Barcarola—"Ah! Pescator"—Gioconda Ponchielli
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85078. "Adamastor, roi des vagues" L'Africaine . . . Meyerbeer
85079. Monologo—"Pari Siamo" Rigoletto . . . . . Verdi
85080. "Eri tu che macchiavi" Ballo in Maschera . . . Verdi
85081. Prologue—"Pagliacci" . Leoncavallo

M. Plancon, Bass.
81076. "Si tu Veux, Mignonne" Massenet
85082. "Air du Laboureur" (Les Saisons) . . . . . Haydn

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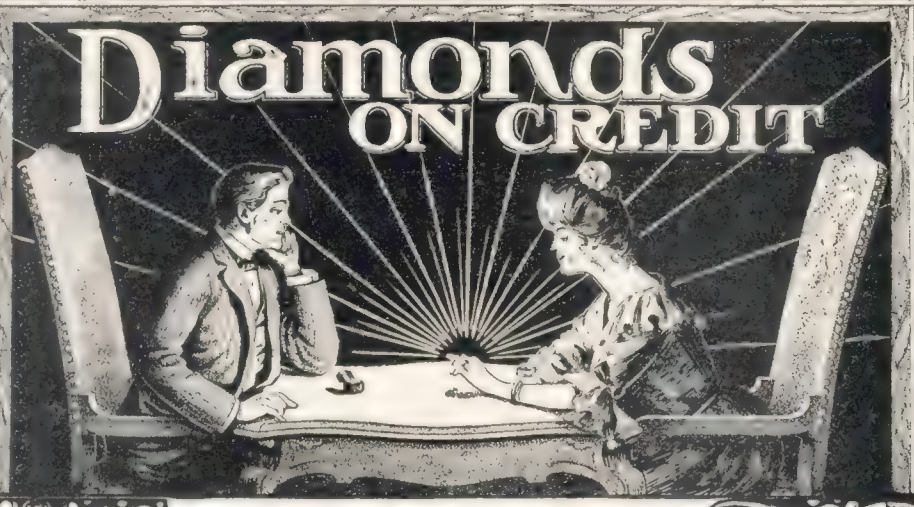

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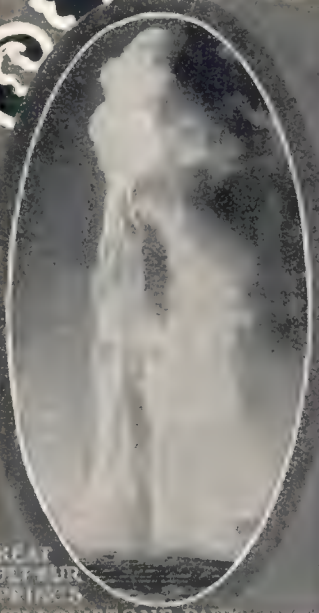

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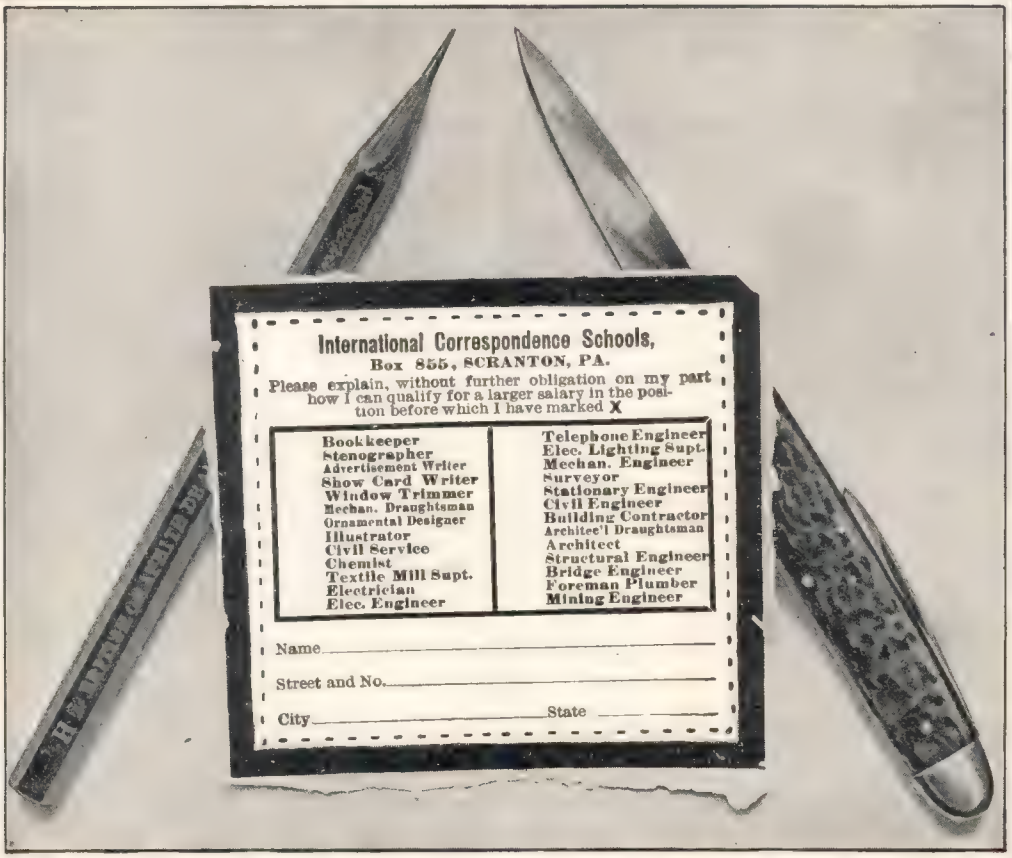

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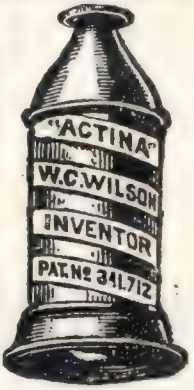

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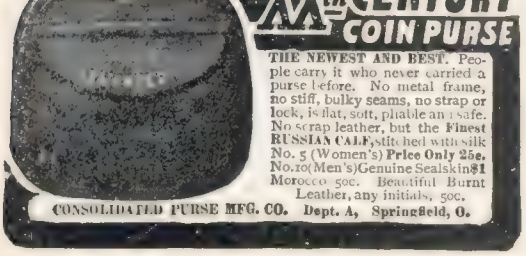

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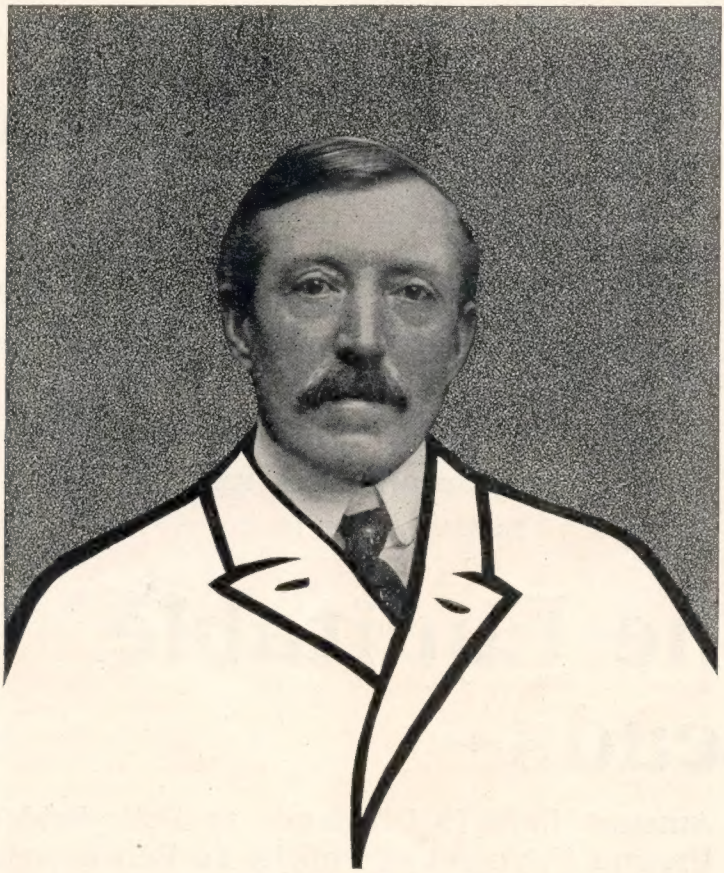

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Author of "The Ransom," "Elaine," "The Other Woman," etc.

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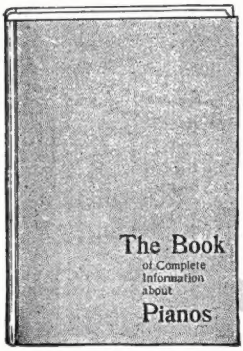

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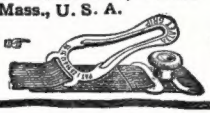

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